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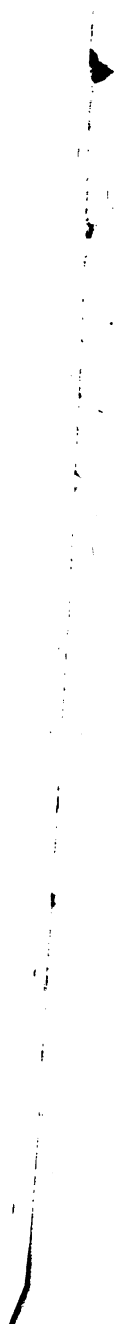
BY

ADELINE SERGEANT

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CHRISTINE

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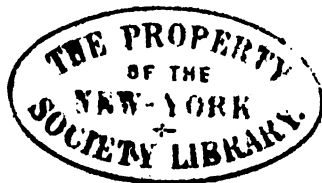
A Novel

BY

ADELINE SERGEANT

AUTHOR OF

"BEYOND RECALL," "A LIFE SENTENCE," "JACOBI'S WIFE,"
"NO SAINT," ETC.

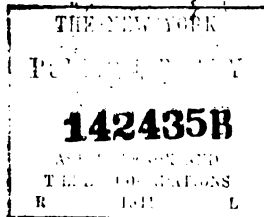


NEW YORK

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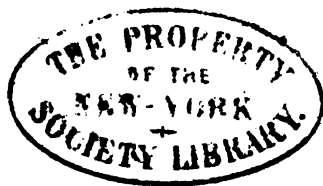
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F



• CHRISTINE.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTINE.

"MOTHER dear, is anything the matter?"

It was Christine who spoke—Christine, gentle and stately, with her graceful figure suddenly arrested in crossing the room, her thoughtful dark eyes and finely chiselled face turned anxiously towards the fragile and delicate mother, whose start and exclamation of pain had attracted her eldest daughter's attention.

"Mother dear, what is it?"

Mrs. Lingard stirred uneasily in her easy chair, but did not speak at once. Her thin white hand was laid over a formidable-looking blue paper in her lap, where she had let it fall with the sound, half sob, half moan, which Christine had heard; and the color had fled from her soft withered cheeks and tremulous lips. She had been a beautiful woman in her youth: she was interesting and attractive in her age; and it was pleasant to see beside her a daughter whose resemblance to herself was so striking as to afford cause for the prognostication that Christine's own age would some day be as beautiful as her youth. The mother had been a widow for some years, and no longer wore the insignia of mourning; her

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soft gray dress, and the delicate lace on her head and at her neck and wrists, the dainty white shawl, the plain but valuable pearl brooch that clasped her gown, were, however, strictly appropriate to her age and condition, and formed the most becoming garb that any old lady of sixty years could wish to wear. Her surroundings were also becoming and appropriate. •

There was no greater pleasure in life to her daughters Christine, Sylvia and Nelly, than to minister to their mother's wants—to see that the fire near which she sat was burning pleasantly, that she had the softest chair and the nicest footstool, that the draught screen was placed at exactly the right angle, and that the flowers on her table were fresh and fragrant. Mrs. Lingard was too unselfish to have claimed these attentions for herself, had they not been given voluntarily; but they formed a chief part of the pleasure and innocent gratification of her life. "My children are so good to me!" she used to say, with a tender, satisfied little smile. And it would have been hard to seem anything but "good" to so gentle, gracious, loving and lovable an old lady as Mrs. Lingard.

If there was one weak point in her character—as there must be in the character of every human being—it showed itself on the subject of "family." To her, birth and breeding were the paramount facts of human life; and nothing would convince her that a man of ignoble origin could possibly be as refined, even as upright or as conscientious, as if he had been differently born. She did not obtrude this belief of hers upon the world at large; she was uniformly kind and gentle in manner to those whom she thought her inferiors, but she felt perfectly confident that she and people of her standing were so far removed from the common herd that no amount of condescension on her part would lower her to its level.

This soft yet invincible pride of the mother perhaps lay



dormant in her daughters' hearts; but in their manner it was not perceptible. Christine was gentleness itself; Sylvia was the incarnation of joyous mirth; Nelly, at seventeen, was a bookworm, surrounded by an invisible network of dreams. Ever since they could remember, they had lived the same sheltered, refined, almost cloistered kind of existence in their pretty country home, among their books and flowers. With the world they had had little contact, for the country neighbors with whom they were most intimate were of the same stamp as themselves. Christine had more experience than her sisters, for she had stayed more than once with friends in Paris and in Scotland, and knew that all the world was not cut out in one pattern; but it must be confessed that the four women who composed the household were lamentably deficient in the worldly wisdom of their own day, and did not in the least regret the deficiency.

In so calm, so secluded an existence, therefore, the introduction of pain or anxiety caused a sudden shock. On hearing her mother's ejaculation, Christine moved towards Mrs. Lingard's chair, and put her hand caressingly upon her shoulder.

"Mother dear, what is it?"

"I was only startled, dear. It is nothing," said Mrs. Lingard, trying to smile reassuringly, although her lips were still white. "At least, I hope it may be nothing. Mr. Warburton writes to tell me that the water has got into the Penworthy mines, and that they are hopelessly flooded, and that we cannot expect any returns from them this year—if ever again——"

"But—part of our income has always come from them!" cried Christine in amaze.

"Yes, dear, yes. It will be a great deal smaller. I do not know what we shall do—I do not indeed!" And Mrs. Lingard's handkerchief stole to her eyes, whence the

tears had begun to fall with the ease of age. "Read the letter yourself, Christine, I hardly know what it means."

Christine read and looked very grave. She saw at once that a misfortune had occurred which it would take many years to remedy, if, indeed, it were ever remedied at all. There was no question of a reduction to beggary; but what was involved was the ease and comfort of her mother's life. It would be almost impossible for Mrs. Lingard and her daughters to live as they had done heretofore; and Christine looked forward with dismay to economies and straitnesses to which none of them had been accustomed, and which would press more heavily on the delicate mother than on her girls. But she spoke cheerfully, after that first involuntary pause of dismay.

"Mother, it will be only for a time! Things will come right by and by; I can see it from what Mr. Warburton says. We shall have to be careful for a few months, that is all."

"A few months, Christine! Years!"

"Well, years then," said Christine, calmly. "We shall have to learn to economize, but it will not hurt us, you know, mother, and we shall have enough to be able to keep everything nice for you."

"It is a loss of quite one third my income," said Mrs. Lingard, tremulously.

"Yes, dear, yes, I know. But we shall be able to manage, never fear; and if we find we cannot make ends meet——"

"Ah! if—what then, Christine? We shall have to give up the dear old house where we have lived so long: we shall have to part—perhaps you will be able to find some almshouse for gentlewomen where I can be left, so as not to be a burden on my children . . . " She was quite unnerved and shook all over as she spoke, while the piteous tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Mother dear, what an imagination you have!" said Christine, gently coaxing her back to calmness. "We shall not be brought to beggary because we have lost a part of your income; we shall only have to live a little more carefully than we have done before, and that will not hurt us."

"But we may lose more—we may lose it all," said Mrs. Lingard, nervously.

"I will write to Mr. Warburton and consult him as to the safety of the rest. And if there is any risk—well, at any rate, mother dear, we three girls are strong and well, and can work for you as well as for ourselves."

"Work!" exclaimed her mother in a tone of distress. "Oh, Christine, I could not bear to think of it! What could you do? You could but be governesses or companions—down-trodden, despised, humiliated! To think of my daughters coming to that!"

Christine smoothed her mother's soft white curls tenderly.

"Dear mother, I don't think that I or Sylvia or little Nelly would be down-trodden or despised at all, if we did some work for ourselves. The world has changed; good honest work is honorable and honored. I am sure we should be very happy if we felt that we were working for you."

"I could not bear to think of it, indeed I could not. Don't grieve me by talking of such a thing!" And Christine was silent, secretly hoping that there would be no need for any of them to go out into the world to work for themselves, but doubtful whether it might not become their duty to do so. The task of convincing her mother as to its desirability might, however, safely be left until the necessity arose.

She was kneeling by her mother with one arm half round her, and the other hand still holding the agent's

letter, when the sound of an opening door made her start a little and rise to her feet. "Oh, I thought it was a caller," she explained, immediately afterwards. "It is only Nelly come back from her walk. Where is Sylvia, Nell?"

"Sylvia is in the garden talking to—to Mr. Arbuthnot," said Nelly, suddenly turning as red as fire, and looking at her elder sister with wistful, frightened eyes which betokened a desire to say more than she knew how to put into words. She was a tall slip of a girl, quite unformed, pale, and a little awkward, but with features that promised future beauty, and a pair of magnificent dark eyes which alone would have redeemed her face from the charge of plainness. As she stood in her hat and long fur boa—made necessary by a touch of keen east wind in the midst of the bright autumn sunshine—swinging her gloves to and fro in one hand, and casting half-petulant, half-pathetic glances at her sister, Christine noted the unwonted color in her cheeks and the swimming radiance of her eyes with a touch of surprise.

"The child is growing quite pretty!" she said to herself. Then, with a questioning look, she led her aside.

"What is the matter, Nell? Don't,"—in an undertone—"don't say anything to vex mother: she is not very well."

"I don't know that there is anything to be vexed about," said Nelly with schoolgirl bluntness. "Only our walk was quite spoilt by that horrid Mr. Arbuthnot; and Sylvia is so funny—I can't understand her at all."

Christine glanced at Mrs. Lingard, but it was evident that she did not hear. She had laid the letter, with a sigh, between the leaves of a book that she had been reading; and was now busying herself with her knitting pins. Christine was glad to see the knitting work come out again. Its tranquillizing influence might be relied

upon for the present to keep her mother calm; and she felt herself free to draw Nelly into the hall and interrogate her somewhat anxiously about Sylvia's doings. Nelly seemed to be suffering acutely from a sense of undeserved injury.

"You know how long it is since Sylvia promised to come with me to the very top of Brent Hill and gather an autumn nosegay? Well, we set off this afternoon, but before we reached the turning out of the high-road, who should we meet but Mr. Arbuthnot! And he began to talk to Sylvia about some old blind woman, and turned back with us, and I didn't like to interrupt; so we passed the turning without her taking the slightest notice of it, and walked nearly as far as Asholt!"

"Poor Nell! But why did you not tell her that she had passed it?"

"Oh, I always feel so shy with Mr. Arbuthnot—I could not bring myself to speak. And they never looked at me," said Nelly in an aggrieved tone: "they walked along with their heads close together and talked so low and so fast that I couldn't hear a word they were saying. Then at last Sylvia woke up and said, 'Oh, here we are nearly at Asholt; we must get back as soon as possible,' and I assure you, Christine, we simply walked back, along the high-road again, *with* Mr. Arbuthnot as we had come, and never went to Brent Hill at all."

Christine stood silent, with her eyes fixed on the roses that clustered round the open door of the sunny little hall, where the tall old-fashioned clock ticked so audibly in the afternoon stillness that it sounded like the beating of some giant heart. Christine's lips still smiled as she listened to Nell's story, but the color had paled a little in her cheek, and unconsciously to herself, a fold of pain showed itself in the fair forehead that was usually so serene. She paused for a moment or two only, and in the sunny still-

ness it somehow seemed to her as though the ticking of the old clock hurt her in some way, and as though a cold shadow were passing between her and the sun. But she shook off the suggestion, and answered her sister lightly, with a caressing word and a laugh that was not quite natural.

"Poor dear Nell! Another time you shall come to Brent Hill with me, and we will not be troubled by Sylvia and Mr. Arbuthnot at all."

"They can go for a walk by themselves, if they like," said Nell, eagerly; "and you and I will keep together, Christine. So tiresome of Sylvia!"—pouting. "Who cares for Mr. Arbuthnot? Why could she not send him about his business, I wonder!"

"Ah!—I wonder," said Christine.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW OF A DREAM.

A SHADOW darkened the doorway for a moment, and Christine, looking up, saw that Sylvia hesitated on the threshold. It needed a little courage on her part to smile and to hold out her hands, and yet she felt instinctively that this was what Sylvia was waiting for, and what she would not be satisfied without. For Nelly's story held a meaning which Nell herself had never guessed.

Christine rose to the occasion. Her smile, the gesture of her outstretched hand, were all that they should be. Sylvia saw nothing amiss.

"Oh, Chris! do you know already?" she said, with a rush to her sister's arms which took the listening and observant Nell very much by surprise.

"What is there to know?" she queried; but neither Christine nor Sylvia replied directly to her.

"I only guessed," Christine whispered. "Is it so, dear, really?"

"He says he loves me: isn't it wonderful? I always liked him, you know," said Sylvia with a little blush, as she raised her face from her sister's shoulder, "but I never thought—I never imagined—anything of this kind. Aren't you surprised too, Christine?"

"No," said Christine, smiling down upon her, "not much."

She was a good deal taller than Sylvia, who resembled her mother much less than did the other sisters, inasmuch as she was shorter, rounder, and of a fairer and rosier type than they. Her brown hair curled all over her head like a child's; her blue eyes danced and twinkled gleefully; her face was as fresh and tenderly tinted as a wild-rose blossom. Quite a different type from Christine or Nelly, she was equally pretty, and perhaps even more universally attractive. And although she did not possess Christine's distinction of manner or Nelly's intellectual tastes, she had special gifts and graces of her own, such as might well justify the Reverend John Arbuthnot in thinking that she would make an excellent parson's wife.

"I wish you would tell me what you mean," said Nelly somewhat plaintively. "It is very unfair of you to have secrets from me now that I am grown up. For you know you said the other day, Sylvia, that I was a child no longer."

"Oh, but I must go to mother," said Sylvia, blushing again. "I can't tell you anything till I have spoken to mother, Nell. And"—to Christine—"he—is waiting, you know. He wanted to come in with me, but I thought I had better speak to mother first, and then I could call

him in. Mother always liked him, did she not, Christine?"

There was something so bright and sweet in her confidence that the news she brought would be welcome to her mother, that Christine could not bear to damp it by any word of caution, although she herself felt certain that it would be more of a grief than a joy to Mrs. Lingard to know that she was likely to lose one of her daughters from her home. She did not belong to the tribe of match-making mothers, and had even yet scarcely realized that her three daughters were marriageable young women and not children in the nursery.

"Go and speak to John, dear," Sylvia said, hurrying with a mingled blush, smile and tear, to the door of the room where her mother sat. "He is dreadfully nervous, poor fellow, and wants somebody to keep up his spirits. You will find him on the lawn."

She nodded smilingly at her sister as she pushed open the door and then closed it behind her. Christine stood silent and—for the moment—unresponsive: it was an unusual look for her to wear. Nelly gazed at her with dilated eyes and a shocked expression of countenance.

"Does Sylvia mean that she wants to marry Mr. Arbuthnot? How extremely nasty of her!" she exclaimed, with great indignation. "How did she ever come to think of such a thing?"

"I should think," said Christine, unable to repress smile, "that Mr. Arbuthnot probably suggested it."

"I daresay. I hate him!" said Nell, quite fierce. "Why should he come bothering like that? Sylvia with an air of mature dignity—" Sylvia is a great too young to think of these things."

"Sylvia is twenty," answered Christine, dryly. "and some girls—Lucy Meadows and Marian Har for example—are married at that age, Nell."

"Very silly of them, then!" said the young moralist, hotly. "I don't think anybody ought to think of marrying, and all that nonsense, until after twenty-five."

"Well, dear, you must set us a good example in that way," said Christine, laughing half against her will; "and, in the meantime, let us go and speak to Mr. Arbuthnot, who is waiting on the lawn."

"You may speak to him if you like," said Nell, with great hauteur, "but *I* am going upstairs. I have nothing at all to say to him; and I consider that he has behaved very badly. He must actually have proposed to Sylvia when I was there!—walking on the other side of the road. I call it a very mean and underhand proceeding."

And Nell escaped to her own room, there to weep a few hot tears of anger and indignation, along with which mingled a troubled feeling that the quiet simple days of sisterly confidence, when she and Sylvia had been bosom friends, were over, and that a new and disturbing element had entered into the family life. In a few days—nay, even in a few hours—Nell might find that disturbing element a pleasant one; but at first it roused in her only a sense of injury and vague regret. For her, as well as for Sylvia, the days of childhood were past.

Christine understood the young girl's passion of wounded feeling better than Nelly understood it herself, and at any other moment would have given a sigh and a smile to its expression. But she had a pang of her own to undergo—a struggling little impulse, which had been born she knew not when nor how, had to be killed and buried, deep, deep down in a grave at the very bottom of her heart, never to lift its head again—and the process gave her pain, for such impulses, how small soever they may have been, have wonderful vitality and are very difficult to kill.

She stood for a moment with her hand on her breast

as though to dull some ache or sting which troubled her, and then she turned towards the door. In the flicker of golden sunshine and long shadow cast, as evening approached, across the lawn, a tall black figure hovered uncertainly, with the manner of one who expects to be summoned to his doom. John Arbuthnot was a handsome, broad-shouldered, manly-looking fellow, but at that moment he was as nervous as a girl.

Not, however, on Christine's account. He had not the slightest shadow of a stain upon his conscience with respect to her. Neither had he the slightest suspicion that in certain days in the springtime, when he had first made his appearance as curate at Brentwood—happy, eager, exhilarating days, when Christine and Nelly had told him the parish politics and introduced him (in Sylvia's absence) to their favorite old women and school-children—he had paid an exclusive homage to Christine which had, all unconsciously, brought that little impulse of liking into existence, and had kept it alive with hope, until——

Ah, until the spring days were over and June brought Sylvia home again! Christine was painfully conscious that John Arbuthnot had never even seemed to see her since the hour when he first set eyes on Sylvia. The half-formed hope vanished into thin air: it had been only the shadow of a dream.

It was with no change of feature—with, indeed, her usual serene smile upon her lips—that Christine went out into the garden and held out her hand to Mr. Arbuthnot. And he, absorbed in his love for Sylvia, and utterly without self-consciousness, seized it in both his own, pressed it, and began to talk hurriedly about her sister and his hopes for the future. Christine listened and answered gently and encouragingly, until Sylvia again appeared and called him in.

"Come to mother, John, she wants you," said the girl

with her eyes full of tears and a smile upon her lips. Her face wore a lovely flush, and her mouth was quivering, but evidently not from unhappiness; and as Arbuthnot sprang forward and took her hand, he thought—as also did Christine—that he had never seen her look so beautiful. Love and happiness had transfigured her. She led her lover to her mother's side—and Christine was shut out, alone.

Looking a little blankly at the fair expanse of velvet lawn and trim flower-beds, still ablaze with autumn glories, beyond which the yellowing branches of the great elm trees which fringed the garden were turned to gold by the long level rays of the sinking sun, Christine queried within herself whether this were not the beginning of the end? whether it were not her lot in life to be the witness of others' joy, and to be shut out into loneliness while other hearts exchanged their vows of everlasting fealty? It was almost the first touch of bitterness that had crept into her fair and sheltered life, and her youth and inexperience showed themselves in this very conviction of hers, that the bitterness would last until the end! For, although she guessed it not, there was much more, both of joy and sorrow in store for Christine than was likely to fall to Sylvia's lot.

The feeling of loneliness was dissipated a little by and by, when she also was called in to sympathize with her mother's mingled grief and joy at the prospect of her daughter's marriage. Christine took the most cheerful view in the world of Sylvia's engagement, and so far enlivened her mother, that Mrs. Lingard was able, at a later period in the evening, to allude almost smilingly to the loss of money which she had just sustained.

"Well, at any rate, I shall be out of the way! It will be one less to keep," said Sylvia, merrily.

"That is almost a pity," Nelly observed, in a medita-

tive tone. "I should rather like to be poor ! I should rather like to go out into the world and earn my own living."

"Child, I wish you would not talk nonsense," said Mrs. Lingard, nervously. "If you knew what being poor and earning your own living really meant, you would not talk of it so lightly."

"Should I not ? I don't know," said wilful Nell. "Sometimes I think it would be very nice to be independent, and to see the world for oneself. Why should we always stay here in this tiny little corner ?"

"Hush, Nell dear, you know you are talking nonsense," said Christine with a warning glance which for the moment silenced the girl's saucy tongue. But although she had silenced Nell, out of consideration for her mother's nervous fear of change, her heart re-echoed the very thought that her young sister had put into words.

To stay in this tiny little corner all one's life ! or to be independent and see the world for oneself ! Which was best ?

A new restlessness had come upon her ; a great desire to cut herself free from the old bonds, and take flight to new scenes and new faces. If only she were forced to work, she thought wistfully, forced to occupy herself, forced to toil and strive, to be anxious and troubled about the minor necessities of life, how much easier it would be to forget the galling sense of failure and mortification which had come upon her ! She was not mortally wounded, not sick unto death ; but she had been hurt, and she wanted to get away from all that reminded her of her pain. She had a conviction that in other circumstances, she would, in time, be able to forget the soreness of heart from which she suffered now.

"But there is no chance of it," Christine said to herself, as she drew up the blind of her bedroom window that

night and looked sorrowfully out upon the garden and the meadows which the September moonlight had changed into a semblance of an Enchanted Land. "There is no chance of change or of absence for me. Mother would not like me to work for myself, and as soon as Sylvia is married, I suppose I shall not even be able to leave home for a long visit such as I used to pay to the Forresters in Paris! Oh for the wings of a dove! I feel stifled in this air. No change—no hope—no help—for years, perhaps! Yet—what do I want? I love my mother and my home; I must be very wicked to want so much to leave them!" And Christine, over-worn by the strain of her emotions, dropped her dark head upon the window-sill, and wept out her heart beneath the soft radiance of the September moon.

And all the while, a little letter was flying from the East to that quiet country village, with a message which was to change the whole course of Christine Lingard's quiet life.

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE OLIVER.

MRS. LINGARD'S financial difficulties did not seem likely to diminish as time went on.

"Worse news than ever," she said one morning, looking up ruefully from the perusal of a letter which had reached her by the second post. "I don't quite know what we shall do if this sort of thing goes on."

"Have you heard from Mr. Warburton again, mother?" asked Christine.

The mother and daughters were sitting in the little

morning-room where they usually spent their working hours. The rain was pouring heavily, and they had all, therefore, settled down to indoor occupations. Sylvia no longer cast wistful glances out of the window as if she hoped to see "her John" come striding up the garden-path: it was really too wet to expect even *him*; so she had betaken herself to some church embroidery which was destined to adorn *his* church some day, and reflected complacently that she could get through a great deal of it that morning. Christine was putting the finishing touches to a water-color sketch, and Nell had been busy with her German, until Mrs. Lingard's remark caused her to drop her books into her lap and look up with dreamy eyes which seemed to see nothing, but were capable of the most vivid flashes of intelligence.

"I have heard from him indeed!" said Mrs. Lingard, with a sigh. "Further losses still. I shall have a much smaller income, my dear children, than I ever had in my life before——"

"But you will have one less to keep very soon," said Sylvia, with a becoming blush. "In the spring, you know, mother——"

"Oh, my dear, as if the little you eat and drink made the difference!" cried Mrs. Lingard, with a touch of contempt. "It is not that; it is the house and the gardens and the servants and everything! We shall have to live differently, we must learn to retrench in every way. It might be worse! We might have lost everything; as it is, it is only—troublesome."

"We must make it as little troublesome as we can," said Christine, softly.

"Why don't you write to Uncle Oliver?" asked Nell, suddenly coming down from the clouds and looking keenly at her mother. But Mrs. Lingard did not receive the suggestion favorably, and the elder girls looked at Nell with

rather a shocked expression, as if she had said something terrible.

"I don't see why you all seem so shocked," said Nell, with great intrepidity. "What is it, mummy dear? I know that Uncle Oliver was once very disagreeable, but it's a very long time ago; and if one can judge by the delightful things he sent us from Cairo last Christmas, I should say that he wants to be friends. So why not write to him when we are in trouble?"

"You do not understand the matter, Nelly," said her mother, with a touch of dignified reticence in her voice. And Sylvia inquired sarcastically, in what way Uncle Oliver could be expected to help them? Did Nell think that he could be asked to supply the missing hundreds from her mother's income, or simply to pay house-rent and servants' wages? And did she suppose that it would be a right and proper proceeding to ask for help from a man who had behaved with shameful callousness and indifference to his brother and his brother's daughters for upwards of twenty years?

So hot did Sylvia wax upon this theme, that her mother had at last to interpose a deprecatory word.

"You must remember, my dear, that your uncle did nothing actually blameworthy. He did not show a very friendly spirit to us—that is true; but he acted quite within the limits of the law."

"That is a very poor thing to say of a man!" cried Sylvia, indignantly.

"I wish you would tell me exactly what he did do," said Nell.

Christine held her peace. She knew the story.

"There is very little to tell," answered Mrs. Lingard, rather nervously. "Your father and your uncle Oliver were brought up by *their* uncle—old Francis Lingard, who had made a large fortune in the East Indies. He had few

relations—only one cousin, I believe, the father of Mrs. Max Brendon, you know—and he had determined to leave all his money to the two brothers, seeing that Mr. Lingard of Riversmead and his daughter had sufficient of their own.”

“Yes,” said Nell, as her mother paused. “Well, I know he left it all to Uncle Oliver—but why? Had father offended him?”

A faint color showed itself even now on Mrs. Lingard’s withered cheeks as she replied to this question.

“Your father offended his uncle, my dear, when he married me,” she said, with a smile which showed her scorn of the offence.

“Oh, mother dear!—but why?”

“Because I was not rich, my dear child. As far as family was concerned, I was his equal—perhaps”—with a little touch of wounded pride—“more than his equal; but that was not what old Lingard cared most about. He wanted his nephew to marry a very wealthy lady, and when your dear father refused and made me his wife, his uncle disinherited him and left everything to Oliver.”

“And what happened then?” asked Nell, curiously. “When the old man died, what did Oliver do?”—She was treating it so exactly as if it were a story out of a book, that Mrs. Lingard felt compelled to bring her back to real life by an extra touch of ceremoniousness.

“When *your great-uncle* died,” she said, with an emphasis on the words, “and it was found that everything was left to your uncle Oliver, a good deal of surprise was felt, especially as there had been a reconciliation between your father and old Mr. Lingard during almost the last moments of his life. It was then quite evident what the poor old man wanted to do. ‘Oliver will make everything right,’ he said. But, as it happened, your Uncle Oliver took his stand upon the will and his legal rights, and said

that he must act in accordance with what *he* knew of his uncle's wishes."

"So he kept all the money for himself!" exclaimed Nell.

"It was not that which caused the disagreement," said Mrs. Lingard, firmly. "Your father had sufficient for himself and for us, and did not care one straw about the money: he was far too high-minded to quarrel with his brother about that; but he resented the imputation on his honor and honesty that Oliver was wicked enough to cast——"

"Oh, mother! What an old wretch he must be!"

"You see, dear, your uncle was of a suspicious temperament, and could not believe in your father's truth and generosity. So he accused your father of trying to overreach him, and then—there was a quarrel. And you can perhaps scarcely wonder at it."

"I hope you are satisfied now, Nell," said Sylvia with warmth, "that it would be quite impossible to ask Colonel Lingard to assist us in any emergency!"

"You should have told me before," was Nelly's prompt response, "and then I should not have made the suggestion. As it is—I don't quite see, mother, why you accepted the presents he sent us last Christmas? I should have sent mine back if I had known all I know now."

"My dear Nelly," said her mother, gently, "you young people are too hasty in jumping to conclusions. Your father always wished in his later days that he had not so completely severed himself from Oliver, and he used to say that although *he* could not make any advances, yet, if Oliver expressed any sorrow for the past and showed a desire to be friendly, it would be wrong for us to thwart him."

"Well—*did* he ever say he was sorry?" Nell asked, incredulously.

"He said as much—he wrote to your father at last, and your father replied to him shortly before his death. I did not feel justified in refusing his gifts to you ; I suppose, that if he came to England we should meet civilly ; but on the other hand,"—and here Mrs. Lingard showed some excitement of feeling, although she spoke in carefully modulated tones,—“I—I personally—would not ask him for a farthing—even if I were starving—for I could never forget the way in which your father was wounded by his cruel suspicions.”

The girls sat silent for a moment or two, awed by the intensity of emotion which had crept into her quiet voice ; but she soon recovered her composure and spoke with her usual placidity. “It would grieve your father to think that we refused any voluntary act of kindness from his brother,” she said, speaking, as she often did, of her husband as of a person still living. “He was always attached to Oliver.”

“Only,” said Nell, stretching out her arms with something between a groan and a laugh, “we are not very likely to be tried by offers of kindness on Uncle Oliver’s part, I fancy ! What a very unpleasant individual he must be.”

“He was not very agreeable in his younger days—he may have improved now. He has a very good post in Egypt ; and I heard the other day that he would probably be made a Pasha before long. I really do not know,” said Mrs. Lingard, helplessly, “whether to be a Pasha is a distinction or not.”

“Let us say it is, it sounds better,” said Sylvia. “It is a distinction to *us* surely—think of having a very magnificent three-tailed Bashaw for an uncle !”

“It makes very little difference to us,” said Christine, smiling and lifting her head from its bent attitude over her drawing. She had been very quiet of late, and seemed

glad to bury herself in occupation which required much care and absorption of mind. But when she was addressed she was cheerful and bright in manner, and her unusual silence was generally attributed to anxiety about her mother's money affairs. "Our Uncle Oliver does not concern himself much about us, I fancy."

"There's the postman," said Nell, who had tossed her books on the table and risen from her seat. She stood peering into the gray distance through the rain-washed panes of the window. "I'll run to the door and get the letters, and tell Susan to give him a glass of beer."

She was gone for some moments, and when she returned she had two or three letters in her hand. "All for mother," she said, dropping them into Mrs. Lingard's lap, "and only one of them interesting. A foreign letter: suppose it were from the Pasha himself!"

They all laughed at the supposition; but Christine noticed that her mother changed color and looked rather nervously at the envelope with the foreign stamp. But she opened the other letters first, and touched the other with a curious reluctance. Only Christine noticed her demeanor, for Sylvia and Nell had again betaken themselves with zest to their several employments. It was after a considerable pause that Mrs. Lingard broke the silence.

"One has often heard of coincidences," she said; "but we seldom come across them, I think, in real life. Here is one, Nell—a rather strange one too. This letter is from your Uncle Oliver."

"Didn't I say so?" inquired Nell, recklessly.

"Why has he written to you—now?" asked Sylvia, with displeasure.

"I hope it is not an unpleasant letter, mother dear?" said Christine.

It was to be noted that none of them imagined for a

moment that their mother would keep the contents of the letter to herself. There existed a very large amount of confidence between the mother and her daughters ; and in this instance, their expectations were not disappointed. With half a smile and half a tear, and a hand that trembled as it held the surprising letter, Mrs. Lingard proceeded at once to give the girls a notion of its tenor.

“ He writes a very nice letter—as nice, I suppose, as he knows how to make it. He says that he regrets the past, and hopes that we will accept his friendship for the future.”

“ I daresay ! ” cried Nell.

“ Hush, Nelly dear. He seems to be very much in earnest. He says something about providing for his nieces, and—” Mrs. Lingard’s voice faltered as she went on, “ he invites one of you to go out this winter and spend a few months with him. He has enclosed a check for one hundred pounds, for outfit and passage money. So now, what is to be done ? ”

CHAPTER IV.

AT COLONEL LINGARD’S HOUSE.

ON the shores of a tideless sea, stands a low ridge of sand-hills, dotted by white and yellow houses, fronting the Mediterranean as gayly as ever did the old Roman villas over which the desert sand has drifted and the modern town is built. The houses have a bright, new, prosperous look : some of them are half-covered with gorgeous masses of flowering creeper, bougainvillia or clematis ; some of them are painted light blue, yellow, or pink, as the fancy of their residents has dictated ; most of

them are surrounded by gardens, small or large, where the modern system of irrigation has made the desert to blossom as the rose, where palm trees wave their feathery fronds and the gaunt poinsettia branches thrust forth their crude scarlet leaves like living flames against a background of violet sky and sea or yellow sand : there is a red-roofed English church, with a tiny spire and a jangling bell : there are roads and railway stations, and trains once an hour to the city of Scanderia. So modern is the outlook, that one is tempted to forget what the sand-hills cover : how their gentle heights mark the remains of Roman temple, pleasure house or bath ; how, beneath even these relics, lie the fragments of a civilization older than that of Rome or Greece itself ; or how we tread at every moment over the graves of a vanished empire,—of the Egypt which has been the ancestress of nations, the nursing mother of the world. Ancient life and modern are here, as in almost every Oriental country in our day, inextricably mixed ; it is the mixture which has a fascinating novel charm of its own for the jaded palate of the Western traveller. The incongruity of blending Western science, modern inventions and the last refinement of luxury, with the barbarous magnificence and primitive simplicity of Eastern customs, is more alluring than either would be if taken alone.

Thus, in one of the houses on the sand-hill looking towards the Mediterranean, every art of the East and of the West had been put into requisition to produce a pleasant and luxurious whole. The garden was full of heliotrope and roses, although it was not yet the season of flowers, for the Egyptian winter was just beginning, and a fountain spouted upwards from a marble basin fringed with lilies, and made a gentle murmuring in the air, a murmuring to which the drying leaves of banana and palm-tree made whispering reply. A broad flight of steps led

to a wide veranda, which ran almost round the house ; being roofed in, partially matted and provided with lounging chairs, it formed an important item in the accommodation of the house. On entering the wide door which fronted the steps, a hall, from which most of the rooms could be entered, was reached at once : it was exquisitely fitted up with screens and panels of the beautiful carvings known as *mooshrabeah* work, into which colored panes of glass were introduced ; the brass hanging lamps were of Moorish work, and the rugs with which the floor was strewn were of the ancient Persian silk texture so much prized by connoisseurs. The eastern character of the room was in fact so well maintained that it was almost a surprise to a visitor to be received on his first entrance by a servant in European clothes, who announced his name with the mingled aplomb and gravity of an English butler. The other servants were Arabs, but this man, a Swiss by birth, had remained faithful for many years to the varying fortunes of Colonel Oliver Lingard.

It was after nine o'clock at night when a young man ran lightly up the steps, and entering the hall without ceremony, was met by the Swiss, who bowed profoundly, and allowed a little smile of pleasure to become visible for a moment upon his sallow and impassive countenance. It was evident that the visitor was a general favorite, for the brown face of a richly-dressed sufraghi, or table servant, who hovered in the distance, became also irradiated with smiles.

"Ah, good-evening, George. The Pasha is at home, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir ; he has been at home all day. His foot very bad, sir," said George, who spoke fairly good English with a foreign accent.

"Is he on the veranda? I'll go to him. Any one else there?"

"Only Monsieur Florian, sir. He has been here all day."

Both servants, Arab and Swiss, took note of the involuntary pause made by Captain Greville when he received this information. Both knew as well as possible that Captain Greville of the Wessex Regiment, and Mr. Paul Florian, private secretary to Colonel Lingard, detested one another. And the sympathies of the servants were with Captain Greville.

"Say that I have called," said Greville, after that momentary pause, and he walked straight into the drawing-room with a touch of formality in his manner that had not been there before. George retreated in search of his master, and Captain Greville was left alone.

The outer hall had been but dimly lighted by the hanging lamps, wherein the flame showed jewel-like through the ruby and violet tints of the glass with which the pierced sides of the beautiful brass vessels had been filled; but the drawing-room was bright with the mellow radiance of rose-shaded wax candles in silver sconces, reflected in a hundred shining points of brilliant glass and metal work. The colonel had furnished his hall (and his smoking-room also) in Oriental fashion, but in the drawing-room he had allowed more modern taste to predominate. Here was luxury indeed, but of the conventional kind—as expressed in velvet and satin, inlaid woods and silver work. It spoke well for his judgment that the room was pleasant to the eye: the colors were subdued and delicate; for, as more than one person had observed, it was a lady's room,—not at all the sort of place in which a rather rough old veteran could have been expected to install himself.

Gilbert Greville knew the room well, and had always been amused by the want of harmony between it and its owner. He glanced round it as he stood waiting for an expected summons to the veranda; for, as he could tell

by the sound of voices and the scent of cigars, the colonel and his secretary were outside; and as he glanced, his eye fell upon an object which, he was quick to see, had not been present when he last entered the room. He looked once—looked again; then crossed the floor, and stood before the easel on which the thing rested which had attracted his attention.

It was a woman's photograph.

Such a thing had never been seen in Colonel Lingard's rooms before. Greville was sure of that. The colonel's taste in art was crude: in women even more so. He liked oleographs and actresses—preferences which Captain Greville did not partake. Now this photograph represented an English lady—not of the actress type at all; and it was taken in the best manner of the most artistic of London photographers. It was quite a surprising thing to find so charming a portrait in Lingard's house—and in the place of honor too, on an easel, draped with costly Turkish embroidery, standing by itself on a table inlaid with mother-of-pearl and lapis lazuli.

"Who can it be?" Greville muttered to himself, as he stooped to examine the pictured face.

He had never seen anything that interested him so much. The sweet oval face, the pensive eyes looking straight towards the spectator, the proud grace of the half-turned head, the lovely lines of the bare neck and arms—these were beautiful indeed; but there was something more than beauty in that sun-painted face. There was thought, mind, soul, and some ethereal charm that chained his eyes, while it puzzled his intellect; something that attracted him in spite of himself. For he did not want to be attracted; he had long ago vowed to himself that he would never lose his heart to merely a pretty face. There was something more than prettiness here; and yet he felt

almost angry, as he turned away, at the keenness of his own admiration for its beauty.

"You admire the portrait?" said a smooth, bland voice behind him. "It is certainly charming; I perfectly agree with you."

Greville answered by something like a growl. He was not prepared to find himself in perfect agreement on any subject with Paul Florian, the private secretary of Colonel Lingard. He turned round and cast a haughty glance at the speaker, as if to rebuke him for his out-spoken admiration. But that glance produced very little impression on Florian; who stood smiling affably, as if his remark must needs have been a very agreeable one.

The two men were singularly unlike. Greville belonged to a Northern race, and was tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, as any Viking of ancient days; fair, moreover, and blue-eyed, though with the darker hair and more finely chiseled features which showed an admixture of Norman blood. His appearance evidenced a combination of physical strength and mental culture which is somewhat unusual; and in this respect appearances were not deceptive, for Greville was not quite an ordinary man. He had excelled all his life in manly sports without losing his taste for what is best in literature and art; and the result was that he had become a somewhat many-sided man, who could talk at one moment as if his only interest lay in dogs and horses, and at another as if scholarship and archæology were the supreme objects of his life. He had a fairly good baritone voice, could sketch well, and play the piano in a dashing, masterful kind of way; was a good shot, a clever rider, and an admirable officer; so that he passed for an accomplished man, and was extremely popular in his regiment and in the world at large. He was not rich, but he had a property of his own in Scotland, and there was a title in his family that would come to him one day,

if a certain noble lord, now sixty years of age, did not marry and have heirs; and it was little wonder, therefore, that his society was sought by women as well as men, or that he had been for some years the spoiled darling of worldly mothers and portionless daughters, who had, as yet, however, spread their nets for him in vain. He was a little spoiled: the peculiarity of Gilbert Greville's constitution was that he knew, and in some ways regretted, the extent of the spoiling.

The man who acted as Colonel Lingard's secretary was scarcely of medium height, and beside Greville he looked undersized and of mean appearance, notwithstanding the fact that his limbs were supple and well-proportioned and his features by no means destitute of beauty. Florian was the typical modern Greek of the lower class as clearly as Gilbert was the aristocratic Englishman; and it was scarcely probable that the two types would amalgamate in friendship. Florian's face was lean, sallow, hairless save for a small black mustache; his thin features were, however, finely cut, and the broad brow, mobile eyebrows and piercing black eyes expressed a high degree of intelligence. To Gilbert's mind there was always something unpleasant in the subtlety of those dark glittering eyes, the compression of the beautifully curved thin lips. He said to himself that he read cruelty in the one and cunning in the other—but then he was an Englishman, and possibly prejudiced. At any rate, it was well known that there was no love lost between the colonel's two prime favorites, the English captain, and the hybrid half-Greek secretary.

Florian was usually spoken of as a Greek, but, as a matter of fact, nothing was known as to his nationality. He had recently registered himself at the Consulate as a British subject, but on what grounds nobody was aware. He was not in the habit of taking any one into his confi-

dence, and he Anglicized his name and his dress as much as possible so as avoid curiosity.

Captain Greville glanced at the man, then made a step forward as if to pass him. "Is the colonel outside?" he asked.

"He is on the veranda. If you will have the goodness to give him two minutes' grace, he will see you there, Captain Greville," said Florian, bowing and rubbing his supple hands together. "For the moment, he is engaged; the doctor has just called—but in two minutes——"

"Certainly, I can wait," said Greville, turning aside, and taking up a newspaper.

He scarcely believed Florian's report. He had received a note from the colonel, asking him to call; and it was not like old Colonel Lingard to keep a man waiting after a summons. He would hardly have noticed the delay but for the fact that Florian mentioned it. "I am glad you have noticed that photograph," said Florian, suavely; "as the colonel is sure to ask you how you like it. And I am glad you admire it; the colonel is dissatisfied"—he smiled and sneered as he spoke—"unless it is admired. One cannot praise it too highly."

Captain Greville made an impatient movement, and glanced at the secretary as if he wanted to silence him; but he felt that it would perhaps be difficult to do. Florian wore the red fez or *tarboosh*, so universally adopted by officials in Egypt; and, as he moved a little restlessly from one part of the room to another, Greville reflected that the pale face beneath the crimson head-gear would stand very well as a representation of Mephistopheles in modern life. Decidedly he was not fond of Mr. Florian.

"Perhaps you have met the lady?" said the Greek, pausing before the photograph, and sneering at it in his usual way. "No? Then you must expect the pleasure of an introduction before long. She is coming out here."

"Out here?"—Greville made the ejaculation involuntarily, and hated himself a moment later for making it. He never spoke to Florian when he could help it.

"Yes," said the secretary, gently. "She is coming out here to her uncle's house. Her uncle is our very good friend, Colonel Lingard. This is a photograph of Miss Christine Lingard, the colonel's niece."

And although Greville could not have said why, it struck him as an absolute certainty that Mr. Paul Florian hated the colonel's niece, and would have given the world to prevent her arrival at the house. He was on Christine's side against Florian henceforward and forever.

CHAPTER V.

THE COLONEL'S PLANS.

A SORT of subdued roar, something like the cry of a wounded lion, made itself suddenly heard from the veranda. It was followed by an imperious call, in a rough, harsh, masculine voice.

"Florian! Greville! What the dickens are you doing? Why don't you come out at once?"

Greville looked at Florian, who shrugged his shoulders and held out his hands. "What can you expect? He has the gout in his foot," said the secretary. "I obey instructions, but I do not always give satisfaction."

Greville brushed past him rather grimly. He cared for neither explanations nor excuse from Mr. Paul Florian. He would not have cared in the least, either, if he had seen the look of hatred and vengeance that came over the Greek's face as he followed the handsome Englishman, or even if he had heard the muttered curse which Florian

bestowed upon his stately head. There was an antipathy between them, born of opposing temperaments in the first instance, strengthened by a trifling dispute about a card game one night at the club, and destined to grow to proportions which would have appalled even the valorous Greville, could he have peeped into the future.

Greville stepped out upon the veranda, and Florian followed, close on his heels. The night was glorious, for the moon had risen and cast its golden radiance (golden, not silver, in the sunny south) far and wide, over slumbering Mediterranean and sterile desert land. Before the veranda stretched a garden and tennis-court, dimly seen in that bewildering light; beyond this, a space of uneven sand and then the sea. Two or three palm-trees lifted their graceful heads high above the vegetation of the garden, and flung weird shadows of themselves across the sand. The moonlight seemed to flood heaven and earth; the big, brilliant stars looked insignificant in that mellow glow, which was reflected in trailing lines of glory, on the peaceful sea. In the air there was little sound; the monotonous croak of the innumerable frogs, the hoarse bark of the pariah-dogs of the desert, alone disturbed the silence, which yet was filled with the soft but ceaseless murmur of waves that rose and fell upon the shore.

Upon that scene of peace and beauty, Colonel Lingard's voice broke with an ugly jar.

"What have you been waiting for?" he asked, angrily. "Plotting together, as you young men always do, when you come to an old fellow's house? arranging to have a smoke and a chat when I had gone to bed, eh?"

"By no means," said Greville, promptly. "I thought the doctor was with you."

"We were admiring Miss Lingard's photograph," said Florian, in his smoothest tones. "Captain Greville found it irresistible—as I do."

Greville longed to tell the man he lied, as indeed he had done by implication, but he forebore. Old Lingard trusted the fellow as much as he trusted any one, and Greville would not condescend to accusation. He lifted his eyebrows a little and said nothing, but took the seat and the cigar that the colonel offered him, and wondered why he had been sent for. There was something about the old man that he liked, but he had never been on terms of extreme intimacy with him. The note asking him to call that evening had taken him somewhat by surprise.

Colonel Lingard was not a man who seemed to rely much upon friendship or affection of any kind. He was an irascible man, almost a morose man; yet with strange freaks of hospitality and even of kindness. He kept open house for all the young Englishmen of the place, and seemed really pleased when they passed hours in his billiard-room and tennis-court, playing games among themselves and consuming choice brands in liquor and cigars. He was never very complimentary to these young fellows personally. He told them what he thought of them sometimes with the driest incivility; but he seldom gave offence. The young men laughed, repeated his sayings, and told each other that it was "the colonel's way." Now and then, one more proud and sensitive than the rest, sulked for a time and stayed away; but the delights of that house, where the tennis-court was the best in the place, where pool could be played every evening until midnight, where champagne flowed like water, though not to the exclusion of unlimited whisky, brandies and sodas, and liqueurs—where there was no woman to interfere with masculine pleasures, and no great sense of duty or decorum to check the too liberal tongue—these delights were not lightly to be thrown away; and the recalcitrant youth generally returned to his allegiance without much loss of time.

It must be said at once that Colonel Lingard, though known to be a hard man, had qualities which caused him to be held in respect among his compatriots, and that although he imposed little restriction upon his visitors, they all understood that there were points beyond which they must not go. They must not drink too much, play too high, speak too laxly. The colonel was an English gentleman after all, and though the tone of his house might not be high, it was thoroughly reputable. Otherwise, it is pretty certain that it would not have been frequented by Gilbert Greville, whose tastes were of the cleanly, honorable, and fastidious kind.

The colonel had been a handsome man, and his face, reddened as it was and half-hidden by snow-white hair, was still striking. His red *tarboosh* and long white beard, the gleaming eyes that looked from beneath heavy white eyebrows and gave vivacity to the rugged features, were illuminated by the flame of a lamp which had been placed on a small table at his elbow and which produced Rembrandtesque effects of light and shade upon his face and figure. Some papers lay on the table, and his strong left hand rested upon them, but he held out his right hand to Greville with a certain amount of cordiality, though without attempting to raise himself at all in the long wicker chair which, indeed, he could not leave without assistance.

"Glad to see you at last, Greville," he said. "No pool for you to-night, however. Jamieson and Levett are in the billiard-room, I believe; but I told them I was busy to-night and could not see them."

"You have had another attack, I'm sorry to see, Pasha," said Greville, in his pleasantly modulated voice. He drew up a cane chair and sat down.

"Yes, yes, I've had a touch—Morton says I shall be better to-morrow; he was here half an hour ago. What a row those chaps are making!" as a shout of laughter from

the billiard-room was borne faintly to their ears on the evening air. "Somebody else must have looked in. You had better join them," he said curtly, looking towards his secretary. "Keep them away from me to-night. I don't want any of them."

Florian smiled and moved away with a slight bow, but it was evident that he did not like the dismissal.

"Shall I go too?" said Greville.

"You? no. Didn't I send a note, asking you to come? I suppose it would have been more civil to ask you to dinner; but I'm on toast and water, so to speak, at present, and there would have been only Paul Florian to entertain you——"

Some momentary change of expression in Greville's face made the old man pause and look at him keenly.

"You don't like Paul?" he said.

"Well, frankly, colonel, I don't."

"No," said the colonel, meditatively. "No, I don't say that I like him myself. He is shift, mean, malicious—a slinking cur that fawns on you, and bites your hand when you are off your guard,"—he spoke with sudden passion,—“a lying, dishonest, Levantine brute! I could wish sometimes that the good old days of Ismail were back again: I shouldn't have much difficulty in getting rid of him then."

"Why, my dear colonel," said Greville, as he rolled a cigarette for himself, "you can easily dismiss him now if you want to get rid of him! Your secretaryship is in your own hands; it's not a government appointment."

"I know, I know," said the colonel, uneasily. "I shall get rid of him in time, never fear. But he is useful to me, there is no denying that. After all, a man who is perfectly unscrupulous has a certain value to his superior—as a tool."

"A two-edged weapon sometimes," said Captain Gre-

ville, quietly. But he did not care to pursue the conversation, for he was a trifle shocked to find that Colonel Lingard should care to retain about him a man whom he believed to be absolutely unscrupulous. He smoked his cigarette, and gazed out to sea, noting the contrast between the yellow circle of light cast by the lamp and the mellow flood of moonlight on the waters. For some minutes, the colonel also kept silence, and when he spoke it was in a quieter voice.

"But I did not ask you to come that I might talk about Paul Florian," he said. "I had something else to ask your advice about."

"My advice!" repeated Greville, half laughing, half abashed. "Happy to give it as best I can, colonel; but I'm afraid it won't be of much use."

"Perhaps not, and yet I want it. Your opinion, let us say. You've seen more of the world than most of these young fellows about here—you can tell me what I want to know. You saw that photograph in the drawing-room?"

"Yes, I saw it."

"What did you think of it?"

Greville hesitated before he spoke. "I admired it extremely," he said at last in a grave tone. "I think it very beautiful."

"Ah! That's right. A handsome girl, if she is like the picture. My niece, Greville."

"Well, colonel, I congratulate you," said Greville, pleasantly. "It isn't every man who has so charming a niece to send her photograph to him."

"Eh? No, nor to come out to him when he writes for her," said Colonel Lingard, with a gratified chuckle. "That's what I wanted to tell you, Greville. I have three nieces in England, and I wrote a month ago to ask one of them here to spend the winter with me. That is the one

who is coming—the eldest of the three; her mother sent me her photograph a few days ago, and she will be here herself on Monday.”

“Your niece will be here on Monday?—Florian said she was coming, but I did not know that it would be so soon.”

“What business had Florian to say anything about it?—However, it is true. I suppose it will revolutionize the house a little?” said the colonel, with rather an uneasy look.

“Well—rather!” said Greville. He puffed hard at his cigarette for a few moments, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the sea, then he looked back at old Lingard’s anxious countenance with a gently ironical smile. You won’t ask us up to play billiards so often, I suppose, will you, colonel?”

“That’s one of the things I was considering,” said the colonel, with something of a hangdog countenance. “Of course I don’t mean *you*; you’re always welcome; but I don’t see how I can keep a pack of idle young fellows hanging about the house every evening when Christine is here.”

“Christine! Is that her name?” Greville asked softly. He liked the name. But the colonel did not catch the question and went on ponderously.

“There are several details of that kind that I want to consult you about. I’ve not spoken to anybody yet. Of course if I tell any of the women of the place—Mrs. Ferguson, for instance, or Mrs. Morton—they will all be ready enough with their opinions, but——”

“You’d better speak to some of them, colonel,” said his guest, in a tone of good-humored warning. “You must conciliate the women here, you know, if you want Miss Lingard to have a good time. Then there are lots of things that only a woman can manage for you: Miss

Lingard will want a maid, perhaps, and I don't think either you or I are capable of finding her one—unless she brings one with her.”

“She won't bring one with her,” said the colonel, with just the little touch of brutality in his tone that Greville sometimes discerned and disliked. “She and her mother are as poor as church mice, the lot of them! I sent out money for her passage, but not for that of a maid, I can tell you. Talking of passages, didn't I hear that the Viberts had gone to Italy?”

“Yes,” said Captain Greville, wondering very much at this sudden change of subject. “They went for two or three weeks; they come back on Monday, I believe.”

“From Naples, by P. and O.? The same boat that brings Christine. Ah! And have you got over your fancy for the pretty little Daisy girl?”

Greville started to his feet. His face grew hot, and some hasty words rushed to his lips, words which he struggled to repress. He walked to the balustrade and stood with his hands upon it for a minute or two, striving to calm the anger which the colonel's question had excited within him; then he walked back again to the little table and stood beside it.

“There, there!” said the colonel, looking up at him with a laugh. “I've put my foot in it this time, I suppose. The fact is, Greville, I don't like that little Miss Daisy, and I don't want to see you entangling yourself with her.”

“No fear of that, sir,” said Greville, rather grimly, though a smile was beginning to curl his mouth beneath the big brown mustache, and the shrewd old man knew that his momentary irritation had already disappeared.

“I am glad to hear it. I've a suggestion to make, my boy, and that is why I sent for you. It may sound wild enough to you at first, but by and by you will accustom

yourself to the idea. I don't want you to give me an answer now. I only want you to consider it, and to give me your decision later on."

"What is it, colonel," said Greville, amused, and yet a little fearful of the eccentric old man's next sentence. He had reason to be afraid. Colonel Lingard's proposition could not possibly have sounded more absurd to anyone than it did to Greville.

"I want you," he said (hoarsely and with difficulty, as if he himself felt something of the absurdity of what he was about to say,) "I want you to turn your back on Daisy Touchwood, and make up your mind to marry my niece Christine."

CHAPTER VI.

SPIED UPON.

GREVILLE smothered an involuntary spurt of laughter. There was something irresistibly comic to him in the appearance of old Colonel Lingard as a match-maker. The hard, harsh, suspicious character of the colonel did not lend itself well to sentimental considerations. He did not mean to let his laugh betray him, but the old man's ears were sharp.

"Laugh away!" he said, irritably. "Like all young people, you invariably laugh at your elders' plans for your benefit, and live to regret your laughter."

"I assure you, colonel," said Greville, "that I did not mean to laugh at any plan of yours—either for my benefit, or that of anybody else. But I'm afraid that—although you do me so much honor——"

"You need not make speeches. I know well enough

what these fine words signify. You refuse to entertain the proposal?"

Greville hesitated. Refuse it he certainly meant to do, but he sought for words which should be least wounding to the colonel's pride. The old man misinterpreted his silence.

"It seems to me that you might as well have waited to see the girl before refusing her outright in this way, Greville. Isn't she pretty enough for you? You needn't have any doubts as to her dowry. I mean to see about that. It will be amply satisfactory. Is it that you have some other fancy?—that little Touchwood girl, after all? No? Well, then, you pay a poor compliment to Christine and me."

His voice was growing harsh and rasping in sound: his face reddened angrily, and the veins, always prominent, swelled on his forehead as he spoke. Greville knew that the fits of anger to which the colonel was unfortunately liable, were distinctly prejudicial to his health, and he felt it a point of conscience, therefore, to calm him as much as possible.

"Indeed, sir," he said, earnestly, "I was far from meaning any disrespect either to Miss Lingard or to yourself. Your proposal does me too much honor. You must excuse me if I am a little confused—and—and embarrassed; a man isn't put into this position every day, you know."

"True, true," said the colonel, half appeased, but ready to fly into a rage again at a moment's notice if Greville did not signify immediate submission to all his wishes. "Very true. But—you want to back out of it, eh? You have no desire——"

"You yourself, colonel," said Greville with some adroitness, "told me to take a little time before giving you an answer."

"So I did! So I did!—you are right, my boy; and if you think it well over, I have no doubt about the ultimate result."

"I don't know about that," said Greville, cautiously, "I must tell you, colonel, that I haven't intended to marry just yet——"

"Notwithstanding that very pronounced flirtation with Miss Daisy Touchwood?"

"Be kind enough to leave Miss Touchwood's name out of the discussion, colonel," said the young man, again showing some irritation in his manner. "In fact, I think we had better not discuss questions of marriage at all,"—with a laugh. "They don't tend to peace of mind."

"Well, well! You have promised to consider the matter."

"I'm afraid consideration won't lead me to change my mind with respect to marriage. Besides, colonel, you are reckoning without your host. Miss Lingard is not at all likely to interest herself in me. A girl like that might marry anybody."

"She would do well enough if she got *you*," growled the colonel.

Greville laughed. "Thanks for your good opinion of me, sir. But she might not like me well enough."

"Then she would be a fool—a confounded fool."

Gilbert Greville was not a vain man, and had never thought himself particularly attractive either to man or woman; but this insistence on his merits and on a possible marriage between himself and the colonel's niece began to make him feel dizzy. What did it all mean? Was the old man beside himself? He had never shown any especial favor to Greville before, and here he was now proposing to marry him out of hand to a beautiful girl whom he would dower for the occasion! Greville began to wish to discover the colonel's motives.

He lighted another cigarette, as a hint that he was prepared to be confidential and sociable, and settled himself once more into his wicker arm-chair.

"I did not know you had a niece," he began. "People here are in the habit of saying that you are without relations."

"They are mistaken, then," said the colonel, testily. "I have three nieces—children of a brother of mine. He died some years ago."

"Ah! And their mother—the widow—is living still?"

"Yes—yes." Colonel Lingard's head drooped: his brows gathered heavily about his eyes. "The fact is, Greville, I had for many years a quarrel with my brother. It was my fault, perhaps—well, yes, it *was* my fault, though he misunderstood me, but—well, we'll say no more of that. Anyhow, we did not meet for many years, and I took no notice of his widow and family for some time after his death."

"They were not very well off, I think you said!" Gilbert asked, reflectively.

"Confound you! Why remind me of that? You mean that I ought to have helped them?"

"No, no; I did not even know——"

"That I had not? Well, they didn't require it. They have a very decent income of their own—very decent. There was no occasion for me to play the benevolent uncle," said the colonel, crossly. "The whole cause of dispute between my brother and myself was money, and it became a sore subject between us, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see," said Greville, somewhat vaguely.

"I only stood on my rights," said the old man, in a louder tone, as if he were arguing the point with an opponent. "I took what was lawfully mine. Edmund had forfeited all right to the money by his disobedience. Of course I knew that he wouldn't tell a lie to save his life—

he told the truth no doubt when he said that the old man forgave him on his deathbed,—but it was part of the game to be incredulous, to call on him for proofs, and all that sort of thing, don't you see ? ”

Greville did not see, did not understand in the very least, except that he was being invited to look into the heart of a family quarrel, and that the old colonel's conscience was uneasy, in spite of his noisy self-justification, about the past.

“That's all over now, colonel,” he said, by way of rejoinder.

“All over—yes, but Edmund never forgave me I believe. He took every sharp word I said in bitter earnest, confound him ! And lately, you know, Greville—since my health hasn't been strong—I have regretted it, I really have ; and I have been sorry to think that I had no one in the world to care a scrap for me in my old age ; nobody about me except ”—he hesitated for a moment—“ except hirelings, so to speak, who would rob me on my dying bed ! It's a sad thing for an old man like me to think that, Greville.”

“It is indeed, sir.”

“Well,” continued the colonel, more cheerfully, “when I began to consider the matter, I thought what a fool I had been to cut myself off for so many years from my own flesh and blood. So I did what I could to right things . . . in more ways than one, though that doesn't concern *you* at present, captain. I wrote to the mother of these girls—three of them there are—asking her to send one of them to me for the winter. If I like her—and I think there's no doubt about my doing that—I shall give her a thumping dowry—make an heiress of her ! Gad, why shouldn't I ?—and secure an affectionate daughter for the rest of my life.”

He smote his hand triumphantly on the arm of the long

chair in which he lay, glanced at Greville, then took up a glass of whisky-and-water and drained the contents at a draught.

"And what about the rest of the family?" Greville asked, unconscious of offence. He was simply anxious to know what else the colonel proposed doing.

Colonel Lingard glared at him. "Confound you, sir, what else should I do? If I portion the eldest girl, isn't that enough? Why should *you* try to teach me my duty?—you, for whose benefit I am designing all this!"

"I beg your pardon, colonel," said Gilbert, seriously. "I hope you are not thinking of me in this matter, for I am the last person likely to benefit by what you do. But it seemed to me probable that your generosity would extend to other members of the family as well as to Miss Christine. She herself—if she is what I take her to be—would be the first to have it so."

A certain softening in his voice when he mentioned Christine conciliated the colonel.

"Well, well, well!" he said, his anger subsiding, "I don't know that I ever looked at it quite in that light, Greville, but I see what you mean. I promise you I'll think over it. And if you—if you—married Christine, you know——"

"I can't think why you have fixed on me," said Greville, trying to turn the matter off with a laugh. "You do me far too much honor!"

"I have fixed on you," said the old man, emphatically, "because I believe you to be an honorable, high-minded man, who would take care of my niece and of her fortune when I had gone. I don't want to think of her marrying a fellow who would make ducks and drakes of my money. I've worked for it, and I want to feel that it is to remain in good hands."

"You must tie it up, sir, so that her husband can't get at it."

"I shall do that," said Colonel Lingard, with some excitement of manner; and Gilbert noticed that his large deeply-veined left hand closed sharply over one or two of the papers lying on the table beside him. "I have made things pretty safe already. I don't believe in leaving these things to chance. Hallo! what's that?"

"I heard nothing," said Greville, looking round.

"I thought I heard a footstep near us."

"Hassan or Mahomed, most probably, coming to see if you want anything."

"No, it was not their step." Colonel Lingard spoke low and listened attentively. "Go to the end of the veranda, Greville," he said, "and see whether any one is lurking about."

Greville did the old man's bidding somewhat wonderingly. He had himself heard nothing, and believed that there had been nothing to hear. Colonel Lingard was noted for his suspiciousness of disposition; and to this Greville was inclined to attribute his present fancy. He walked up the veranda and back again, glancing to his right hand and to his left, but although the veranda was full of weird shadows and dark nooks, where a listener might easily have installed himself, he saw absolutely nothing.

"It must have been one of the men leaving the billiard room," he said. "They seem all to have gone by this time. And, by Jove, I must go too, or I shall miss my train."

He saw that the colonel was not listening. The old man had half raised himself in his chair: his eyes were glaring fiercely at something or some one in the darkness: just where the shadow was deepest, he seemed to suspect that a listener was concealed.

"What is it, colonel," said Greville, distressed by his old friend's wild looks. "There is nobody here, I assure you. I have looked everywhere."

"Ah, you don't know him! You don't know him!" gasped Colonel Lingard, whose hair seemed almost to stand on end with excitement, as he still gazed into the darkness. "You don't know the lying hound as I do!"

Was he going mad? Judging from his frenzied demeanor and his incoherent stammering words, Greville could almost have fancied that the old man's brain was tottering. Much more—for one dreadful moment—did he think so, when Colonel Lingard, utterly forgetful of his lame foot, swung himself from his couch with all the agility of a youth, and dashed towards the dark corner, behind the drawing-room door, to which his attention had been directed. Greville immediately sprang forward also with an exclamation half of warning, half of amaze. For, after that first moment of doubt, he saw—what he had not at first suspected—that a dark figure really lurked behind the door, and that it was not the figure of Arab or serving-man, but of the secretary, Paul Florian.

Colonel Lingard, livid with passion, dragged him out into the full light of the lamp, and with his hand grasping the young man's collar, shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. His illness, his weakness, were forgotten. Greville was shocked and alarmed at the fury of his passion. The old man's eyes were like coals of fire; his face was purple and swollen; his voice died away in angry gutturals as he swayed the young Greek backwards and forwards in the grasp of his powerful hand. Florian's face expressed the extremity of fear: with chattering teeth, pale lips, distended eyes, he tried to beg for mercy—and not without reason; for even Greville dreaded least the infuriated colonel should actually strangle his victim before his hold on him could be relaxed

"Hound! Coward! Spy!"

Greville sprang forward to interfere, but at that very moment, the old man's grasp grew loose, his face changed, and he uttered a hoarse gasping cry. The secretary drew himself away like a frightened cur; and Greville was only just in time to receive in his arms the heavily drooping figure of the old colonel as he fell insensible to the ground.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS DAISY TOUCHWOOD.

"I NEVER saw such a proud, stuck-up thing in my life," said Daisy Touchwood, loudly.

She was sitting on a table in the captain's cabin—where she had no manner of business to be—on board the steamship *Cyrus*, bound to Scanderia from Naples, and she had three young men in attendance, ready to wait upon her, hand and foot, and to execute her smallest wish. She was a fair, slight girl, with large blue eyes which were variously characterized by her acquaintances as bold or innocent, infantine or hardened, according to the terms they were on with her at the moment. There certainly was a mixture of babyishness and hardihood in her manner and appearance, which some people thought very attractive. She had a delicate complexion, abundant fair hair elaborately dressed; short childish features, and very white teeth, which she showed a good deal when she laughed—and she laughed often. Her dress was pretty, but inappropriate for an evening on shipboard: it was a white India silk, low-necked and with short sleeves, and she wore gold ornaments on her bare neck and arms. In

addition to her other attractions, she was smoking a cigarette with the ease of long practice, and she had a glass of whiskey-and-water—not too weak—at her side. As she talked, she smoked, drank, and swung her feet (in open-work stockings and bronze slippers) with an engaging frankness which endeared her to the hearts of the three youths who were then competing for her favor.

The third officer of the ship, a young American, and two boyish-looking "army men" were her favored swains, and the captain—although he admired her sister more than herself—was not proof against her fascinations, and invited her evening after evening into his cabin, to smoke her cigarette and drink her whisky-and-water before "turning-in." "She has such a lot of 'go' in her," the young men used to say approvingly; and they liked her slang, and her freedom of speech, and her sharp Colonial accent, far better than the more languid graces of her sister, the beauty, who had married a rich old Englishman and was spending the winter in Egypt for his health.

"She's not bad-looking," said one of the young lieutenants, continuing a conversation in which Miss Daisy had been expressing herself somewhat strongly. "Though," he hastily added—"she's not my style."

"Oh, you think her good-looking, do you, Mr. Mavor?" said Miss Touchwood, with marked coldness. "Well, I'm sorry for your taste."

"I did not say I thought her absolutely good-looking," cried the young man, goaded to desperate denial of his real opinion by Miss Touchwood's tone. "Not bad-looking, I *said*—rather good eyes and hair, you know—"

"And as tall as a May-pole, and as dull and strict as a Methodist," Daisy remarked, with a little sneer. "Did you see her face when I offered her a cigarette the other day? Did you see how she drew herself up, and what a disdainful look she gave me! Oh, my! wasn't it good!"

She burst into shrill laughter, which had somehow an unnatural ring, and took up her glass of whisky-and-water.

"Let's ask her in and offer her some toddy," said the youngest and most thoughtless of the men.

"Oh, bother, don't let us do anything of the sort," said Daisy. "Aren't we going to have a little gamble to-night?"

"Oh, Miss Touchwood, we won't play with you. You're too smart for us; you win all our money."

"Bet you I shouldn't win to-night; I'm dead-beat. You don't know how cheap I feel," said the elegant Daisy, with a toss of her fair, curled head. "I shall go to bed if you won't play. Where's Evie?"

"Walking about the deck with Mr. Perry," said one of the youths, in a slightly malicious tone; whereat the young American, who had hitherto not joined in the conversation but confined himself to staring very hard at Miss Touchwood, gave a start so perceptible that it might almost be called a jump, and thereby drew the attention of the company on himself.

"Well, Mr. Hoskins," said Daisy, "what were you going to say?"

"Nothing, nothing!" Mr. Hoskins answered nervously. "Nothing at all."

He was a pale young man, undersized and anæmic-looking, with anxious, watery, blue eyes and lank dark hair. He generally wore a long black coat and a tall hat, and was vaguely understood to come from Boston and to be "studying for the ministry" among the American Presbyterians. He was a very serious, earnest-minded young man, greatly scorned by Daisy and Daisy's "set"; indeed, the only reason why she tolerated and forced others to tolerate him was his devotion to herself. Ever since she had first met him in Naples (where she and her

sister had been spending a week), he had been apparently fascinated by her ; and the less he understood her or approved of her, the more attracted he seemed to be. Since they came on board, however, Mr. Hoskins had betrayed symptoms of some new feeling, which Daisy could not altogether fathom and which therefore appeared to her unsatisfactory.

"You shouldn't give such big starts if you have nothing to say," she remarked, rebukingly. "I wish you would go and find Evie, Mr. Hoskins, and tell her that we are having drinks in the skipper's cabin."

"Poor old Hosky!" said Mr. Mavor, as the young American moved away. "It's very plain what's the matter with *him*."

"Be quiet," said Miss Touchwood with a jerk of her left elbow. "I do wish you wouldn't talk such rotten nonsense. Is that Evie?"

"Come to keep her little sister in order," said Mavor. "Here we are, Mrs. Vibert. Come in."

"Oh, this is where the kid is," said a voice at the door. It was a lower, more musical voice than that of Miss Daisy Touchwood, and the accent was more refined, but the ugly slang that fell so constantly from Mrs. Vibert's rosy lips sounded even more curiously misplaced than when uttered by her franker sister. Evelyn Vibert posed for the public in every situation of life, and lately she had been posing, not unsuccessfully, as a fashionable beauty. Her waist was so small, her eyes so large and languishing, her complexion so brilliant, that she had some claim to the title; but critics were found who objected that her features were blunt and heavy, and that the full red lips and plump chin would not be improved by time—that, in spite of her large drooping eyelids and languishing air, there was a want of refinement already evident in Mrs. Vibert's appearance. To a stranger, one of the most

salient points in her face was the studied insolence of its expression. The downward curves of the corners of the pretty mouth, the haughty droop of her eyelashes, the turn of her chin, had been carefully cultivated before a looking-glass—they were meant to subjugate mankind. Beside her, Daisy's brusqueness became almost attractive, because it wore the guise of nature and want of affectation.

"This is where the kid is, is it?" said Mrs. Vibert, trailing into the cabin in a black lace dress, cut very low, and displaying some rather good diamonds. A black lace scarf, wound round her head and neck, was at once removed when she came into the warm atmosphere of the lamp-lighted cabin. "Well, Daisy, if you don't want to scandalize Miss Lingard out and out, you'd better clear. I passed her in the saloon just now, and asked her if she wasn't coming on deck, and she had the cheek to say that she thought it rather unusual for ladies to be up here after ten o'clock."

"Just like her cheek," muttered Daisy; but she did not speak quite so loudly as usual, for there was something in the faces of the young men before her—something uncommonly like a suppressed smile—which told her (being quick of apprehension) that there was some truth in what Miss Lingard was reported to have said.

"I think you'd better come down," said Mrs. Vibert. "Thanks, Mr. Perry, I won't take any whisky to-night. Aren't you tired, Daisy?"

She drew her unwilling sister away with her. Daisy was a little under Mrs. Vibert's dominion, and yielded, though with no very good grace; but when they were parting for the night she uttered her word of protest.

"Why on earth did you come so soon? It looked as if you minded what that Miss Lingard said—as if *she* knew what was the correct thing better than you or me!"

"Perhaps she does," said the more prudent Mrs. Vibert. "Anyway, I wish you wouldn't talk against her so much, Daisy. Perry's been telling me about her. She's going out to keep house for her uncle, old Colonel Lingard—you know : the man that is always having Wessex boys to play billiards at his house, and she'll be there all the winter, so we'd better look out."

"We've always had a ripping time at Mahatta," said Daisy, sulkily, "and I don't see how she's to prevent it. Fancy young Mavor telling me to my face that she was handsome."

"She may be handsome, but she isn't smart ; and men like smart women better than handsome ones," returned Mrs. Vibert. "Don't worry about her, but do, for goodness' sake, let her alone."

Daisy shrugged her shoulders, and went off to her cabin without a word. She thought herself extremely ill-used in not possessing a cabin to herself ; more especially as her cabin-companion was a person for whom she had conceived a hot detestation. She would have preferred any woman on the boat to Miss Christine Lingard.

It was not perfectly clear to Christine why she had incurred the enmity of Mrs. Vibert and Miss Touchwood, but that she had done so soon became evident. The sisters were of a somewhat unfamiliar, though not unknown, type to her ; and one which she disliked. She could not help showing in a hundred half-imperceptible ways that their modes of speech, their manners, their tastes, were unsympathetic to her : if by nothing else she displayed her opinion of their doings by the poise of her stately head, the fine scorn of her eyes and lips. And Daisy Touchwood, irritated beyond measure by Christine's attitude of calm superiority, retaliated, as women alone know how to retaliate, by acts of overt rudeness, by little selfishnesses, and little trickeries, which made Christine's

voyage far less comfortable than it ought to have been. Daisy was quite unscrupulous, and therefore gained the advantage; she had no hesitation at all in doing what she preferred—at Christine's cost—even in such small matters as the shutting or opening of a port-hole, the lighting of a lamp, the engrossing of a stewardess. At sea, above all places, charity and unselfishness are necessary virtues; but Miss Touchwood, though ordinarily possessed of a certain amount of good-nature, did not choose to exert them on her fellow-passenger's behalf. Fortunately the voyage between Naples and Scanderia was not a long one, and Christine could always comfort herself with the remembrance that she would soon arrive at her uncle's house, where, as she fondly hoped, the Viberts would not be welcome guests.

Daisy's instincts, which had been sharpened by some months of struggle to get into London society, were keen enough to tell her something of the truth as to Christine's feelings about her; but they were at fault where men's opinions were concerned. The tone of the remarks made after her retirement by the young men with whom she had been sitting in the captain's room might have surprised her.

"Miss Touchwood seems to have a 'down' on Miss Lingard," said Mavor.

Mr. Perry, the man who had been walking with Mrs. Vibert on the deck, laughed slightly.

"I don't wonder at it. Miss Lingard treats her with a quiet contempt which is amusing to see. The fact is, Miss Lingard's a lady; and Miss Touchwood—isn't."

"I should like to know, sir, what you mean by a lady," said the mild Mr. Hoskins, in measured tones of unmis-takable indignation. "Miss Daisy Touchwood is good, beautiful, clever——"

The irreverent young men interrupted him with a shout

of laughter. "Go it, Hosky," cried one of them. "She's perfection isn't she? especially when she drinks her toddy and smokes her cigarettes——"

"I'll thank you, gentlemen," said poor little Hoskins trembling very much, but resolute in Miss Daisy's defence, "not to breathe a word in my hearing against a lady who is to me the sweetest and loveliest of her sex, and with whom you are only too glad to converse when you have the opportunity." He walked away, followed by a chorus of laughter and "Bravos!" But when the laughter had died away, the young fellows looked at each other with rather a sense of shame. "Hosky's right, after all," said one of them, "and Miss Daisy's a jolly good fellow, and ripping good fun. I've nothing to say against her."

"Oh, no, nor I," said Perry. But he said it with a sneer, and as he walked away, he was heard to sing beneath his breath the refrain of a popular song in Cockney dialect:

"Wot I liked about that party wos, they wos all of 'em so re-foined."

which was supposed by his listeners to have some occult reference to Mrs. Vibert and her sister.

Mr. Nathaniel P. Hoskins listened, only half comprehending, yet quite aware that there was some reason for his companions' chuckle of laughter, and that it was at the adorable Daisy's expense. His heart swelled with a strange mixture of simple yet conflicting feelings, which he could not define. He did not at all suspect that his irreverent acquaintances on board had discovered that he was (in their language) "gone" on Daisy, or that there were bets afloat as to his measure of success. Such suggestions and conjectures would have seemed the height of impropriety to Mr. Hoskins. And certainly, Daisy Touchwood was by no means the sort of wife whom

his congregation in New Hampshire expected or desired for their delicate young pastor whom they had sent to voyage in "Yurrupe" for the benefit of his health.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. HOSKINS REMONSTRATES.

"WHAT are you looking at me so for, Mr. Hoskins?" Daisy inquired, on the following day—the fourth and probably the last day of the voyage. It was late in the afternoon, and the ship was already very near the harbor of Scanderia, but owing to the difficulty of crossing the bar after sunset, the passengers would not be landed until the following morning, when a pilot would be sent out from shore to steer the vessel through the narrow passage which formed the only safe entrance to the bay. The passengers had been drinking afternoon tea as they lounged about the deck or sat comfortably in their deck chairs, and the usual amount of lazy conversation was current concerning the usual topics—the day's run, the amount of sun and wind, the caution or want of caution displayed by the captain, and so on. Mr. Hoskins, appearing suddenly from some place of refuge or concealment, presented himself before the astonished eyes of Daisy Touchwood, who was cozily ensconced on a bundle of rugs in the most retired corner of the deck. For the moment she was alone, for the young man who had been whispering "soft nothings" in her ear for the last half-hour, had gone below to fetch a shawl or a book or a scent bottle, or something of which he conceived that she stood in need, and Daisy was left to her own meditations, whereupon Mr. Hoskins came and stared at her.

She was not altogether an unpleasing object. She wore a pale blue shirt and dark blue tie of the latest masculine description, with a serge jacket and skirt of navy-blue. A small sailor hat, very jaunty in appearance, lay on the deck chair beside her. Her bundle of rugs made a seat very slightly elevated above the boards, and her slight figure was wedged into the angle formed by woodwork of the companion-way and the skylight above the saloon. Mr. Hoskins stood and looked at her, as if he were anxious to note every twist of the carefully curled "bang," which was brought to a point in the middle of Daisy's brow and protected from the wind by an invisible net, and every one of the embroidered blue stars on the inches of silk stocking left visible between her dainty shoes and short serge skirt.

"I should hope you'd know me again when you saw me!" said Daisy, pertly. "What *do* you want, Mr. Hoskins?"

"I want to speak to you," said Hoskins desperately, "I must speak to you; it may be my only chance. Oh, Miss Daisy, don't refuse to hear me, I entreat!"

"A proposal!" thought the girl, with complacency. She was not unused to declarations of the kind. She rather liked it to be known that she had had her first offer when she was fifteen. "Well, I never! I shouldn't have believed little Hosky capable of it. I might just as well hear how he does it—he'll be an awful fool at making love!"

"All right," she said aloud. "Come and sit down here. I'll send Dick Mavor away if he comes back; and then you and I can have a real cozy talk."

"I'd rather stand," he said, awkwardly. "I'm more used to standing while I talk, you know."

"Oh, yes, when you are preaching and praying," said Daisy, with guileless simplicity. "But you are not going

to preach or to pray now, so you may as well be comfortable. Sit down—" and she patted the seat beside her with engaging confidence.

"Perhaps I am going to preach now," said Hoskins, rather wildly, "or to pray—I don't know which." He dropped into the seat at her side with a distracted air ; his eyes roved round the wide horizon as if seeking for help in that vast expanse of sea and sky.

"Good gracious ! I hope not," said Miss Touchwood. "Look at those clouds—aren't they awfully pretty ? Oh, here's Dick Mavor. Aren't you cold, Mr. Mavor ? Mr. Hoskins has got your seat, you see, you've been such a long time away."

"I'm sure Mr. Hoskins is welcome to it, if you like," said the young man, huffishly. "I had a great bother in getting your things, I can tell you ; that Miss Lingard was in the cabin, and looked as if she wanted to kill me outright when I said I had come for your hanky and chocolate-box. However, there they are, and I'll go and have a smoke."

"Do," said Daisy, sweetly, as the young fellow threw, rather than placed, the things upon her lap. "I knew you would sooner smoke than sit here with me, so I asked Mr. Hoskins to come instead.—He looked awful sick when I said that, didn't he ?" she said to Hoskins, as Mr. Mavor departed in stately displeasure. "I love to see him taken down a peg. I never saw a man with such a lot of side. Well, Mr. Hoskins, and what are you going to preach to me about ? Something nice ?"

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Hoskins, with a mixture of distress and perplexity which was almost pathetic. "I'm afraid you won't like it at all, Miss Touchwood. The fact is—you know how highly I think of you and of your sister—how I esteem—admire—respect——"

"Oh, get along !" said Daisy, taking a chocolate-cream

out of her box and putting it into her mouth. "Have a chocolate, Mr. Hoskins?"

"Admire and respect!" repeated Mr. Hoskins, mechanically taking the chocolate drop from the box, and then continuing to hold it between his fingers as if he did not know what it was for. "And therefore—I hope you'll pardon what I'm going to say: I guess it is something you have never heard before——"

("How old does the idiot take me to be?" said Miss Daisy to herself, with infinite disdain.)

"I think you ought to know that you are mistaken in some of these gentlemen that surround you. They are not worthy of your regard, Miss Touchwood. They—they—do not treat you with respect."

"How do you know how they treat me?" asked the girl, laughing. A little color rose in her fair cheeks, but she was rather pleased than otherwise. "Some of them are awfully nice to me."

"I mean," stammered poor blundering Hoskins, "that they don't speak of you behind your back—as they ought—not with the respect—the admiration——"

"What do you mean? Who are you talking about?" Daisy demanded rather sharply. "Who has been speaking of me behind my back? Come, out with it, Mr. Hoskins. What have you heard?"

"I—I don't think it would be fair to give any names," said Mr. Hoskins, looking miserably frightened; "but, believe me, I'm quite correct in what I say. They—they talk among themselves about——"

"Well, about what?"

"About girls smoking—and betting—and flirting—and all that," said the young man with humility.

"And what if they do?" said Daisy, subsiding a little, and beginning to laugh scornfully. "What harm is there in that?"

"I don't know. Only they say, some of them, that it isn't quite—proper : respectable, in fact : what people call—modest," quavered Mr. Nathaniel Hoskins, apologetically.

He had done for himself now.

Daisy started up with flaming cheeks and blazing eyes. "How dare you say such things to me ! How dare you ! Not respectable—not—*Thank you*, Mr. Hoskins ! I'm much obliged to you for insulting me !"

"Nothing was further from my thoughts, Miss Daisy ; I wouldn't insult you for the whole world," cried Hoskins, gaining in fluency as she became more and more angry. "Never—never would I so degrade myself in my own eyes ! When I love you more than my life, how could I insult you ? I only spoke because I could not bear to see you lowering yourself in those wretches' eyes. Oh, Miss Daisy, if you would but make me happy by letting me love you—if you would but listen and consent some day——"

"*I* listen ! *I* consent !" cried Daisy, stamping her foot. "I'll never speak to you again ! You are odious, hateful, intolerable ! We've done nothing but laugh at you ever since we came on board, and this is your revenge, I suppose ! I'll pay you out for it ! I'll let every one of my friends know how you have maligned them, and you will see how they will treat you after that !"

She threw down the fan and smelling-bottle that she had been holding, gave a vicious little kick to the cushions on which she had been reclining, then rushed across the deck to the companion-way, and disappeared from Mr. Hoskins' view.

She went straight to her sister's cabin, for she knew that Mrs. Vibert was safely disposed of in a long Indian chair on the deck, and she shrank from the risk of meeting Miss Lingard in her own sleeping-place ; and here, some time afterwards, Mrs. Vibert found her, curled up on the

red velvet sofa, with a very damp embroidered handkerchief in a wisp at her eyes.

"Why, Daisy, what is the matter?" said Mrs. Vibert, standing at her sister's side.

"It's that little beast, Hoskins," replied Daisy, with emphasis. It must be confessed that her language was often wanting in elegance, but Daisy would not be Daisy if her characteristic turns of speech were suppressed by the too fastidious chronicler.

"What has he been doing? Proposing?"

"Oh, worse than that," said Daisy, sitting up and drying her eyes. And then she gave her sister a succinct account of Mr. Hoskins' remarks, interspersed with some biting criticisms of her own. "And I said that we would pay him out," she concluded.

"He isn't worth powder and shot," said Mrs. Vibert, as she stood before the looking-glass, arranging the mass of frizzy curls which half-concealed her forehead. "I wouldn't notice it, if I were you; if anybody *had* been saying that kind of thing—and there are always lots of old frumps on board a ship to say it—we should only get laughed at for making a fuss. Don't be a little fool."

"I'll tell you who I think is at the bottom of it all," said Daisy, angrily. "It's that Miss Lingard. Did you hear her when that man came on board with coral and lava bracelets at Naples? We offered to toss him—five francs or nothing for a bracelet, and I won: then Mr. Mavor asked *her* to join in, and she turned right away and said, 'Oh, no, English *ladies* don't toss, for what they want to buy'—with such a look, and such an accent! I never saw such a prig!"

"I suppose she didn't mean you to hear," said Mrs. Vibert, surveying herself pensively in the mirror.

"I believe she did. I hate her. And she's at the bottom of all this, I bet you, Evelyn. Toad!"

"Daisy, you *are* a little vulgar sometimes."

"I don't care. I'd sooner be vulgar than priggish and stuck-up. Oh, how I should like to take Miss Lingard down a peg or two! I may have a chance yet!"

"You'd better keep quiet about it, then. Here, take my eau-de-Cologne, and bathe your face. I hear Gervase coming down. You've made a perfect fright of yourself, Daisy, and I'm sure you needn't cry over anything little Hoskins has said. Just cut him for the future. We shall be in to-morrow, and probably we shall never see him again."

Daisy departed rather sullenly: she did not think that Evelyn sympathized sufficiently with her woes, but secretly she acknowledged that the advice given had been wise. There was no use in telling the young men on board what Mr. Hoskins had said.

When she went on deck again, she tossed her head faintly as she saw that Miss Lingard and the young American were leaning over the bulwarks side by side and talking together. "They are talking about me!" said Daisy to herself, and although at that moment she was wrong, she had been the subject of their conversation not long before.

For Hoskins had seated himself in an out-of-the-way corner and buried his head in his hands with an air of such extreme dejection that Christine, who had spoken to him several times, felt quite sorry, when, in the course of a walk up and down the deck, she perceived his attitude.

"Mr. Hoskins, I hope you are not ill," she said at last, stopping short beside him, and speaking kindly.

He looked up with a start. "No, no, thank you, I'm not ill, Miss Lingard; but,"—emboldened by the gentleness of her tone and the serene goodness of her face—"I'm—I'm in trouble." And the tears started to his little gray eyes as he spoke.

"I am sorry. I hope it is nothing serious."

"I think my heart's broken," said Hoskins, with something like a sob. "Oh, Miss Lingard, you can't think how I love her—Miss Daisy, I mean——"

Christine's face fell a little. She loved Daisy Touchwood as little as Daisy loved her. But she spoke compassionately to the poor young man when he had told her his story, although she counselled him to forget the undeserving object of his affections. "I don't think you need make yourself unhappy about her, Mr. Hoskins; you will some day find a woman who will make you a much better wife than Miss Touchwood."

"But I love Miss Daisy, and I shall never love anybody else—not if she was the best woman in the world," sighed Hoskins.

He was unreasonable; but her heart warmed to the unreason. She spoke gently to him about other things; and it was then that Daisy saw them looking over the side of the ship together, and wondered if they were talking about her.

After dinner, she voluntarily addressed Miss Lingard—a thing which she had seldom done before, as the two girls had avoided each other throughout the voyage by mutual consent. "You are going to stay at Mahatta, I hear?" she said, rather abruptly.

"Yes. With my uncle, Colonel Lingard," said Christine coldly.

"I know him. He's a very jolly old boy. All the Wessex men go there a good deal. I don't suppose they'll go there so much now."

Christine kept silence. "There's one awfully nice man who used to be at his house a great deal—Captain Greville," said Daisy, with a malicious gleam in her blue eyes. "But he hates women—he always thinks they want to marry him. He's a great friend of ours, but he does not

care for anybody else at Mahatta. I don't suppose you would like him: he's not your form at all."

"No, I should think not," said Christine, with unconscious irony. But something in her tone offended Daisy, and the young lady swung round on her heels and walked away as abruptly as she had come up. Christine laughed to herself at the sudden departure, and yet felt a little bit uncomfortable. She had never before known what it was to be thoroughly disliked and unpopular. She wondered whether it was in any degree her own fault. She thought not—but she could not be sure.

With morning light came the first view of the low circling harbor with its upright lines of lighthouse and minaret and pillar strongly marked against a clear blue sky: then came the pilot, in turban and trousers and colored sash—a picturesque figure in English eyes, as the first sign yet seen of the gorgeous (but decidedly filthy) East: then a crowd of vessels at anchor and the bare stone quay, lined by squalid-looking offices and warehouses which entirely blocked out any view of the town. Christine had to wait on board until some one met her. Mr. and Mrs. Vibert and Miss Touchwood were just "going off," when the captain accosted her and asked her gravely to come into his cabin. With him, she noticed, stood a tall, handsome man in uniform, who was at once presented to her as "Captain Greville."

"Miss Touchwood's friend! There must be some mistake," thought Christine, as she returned his bow; but this reflection was banished by his next words.

"I have come straight from Colonel Lingard's house to meet you. He told me that you were coming by this boat; but, unfortunately—he was taken very ill on Thursday—very ill indeed—and——"

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Christine, not at all divining

the truth of which his grave looks seemed to warn her. "Is he no better? Is he very ill?"

"I am afraid it will be a great shock to you," said Greville, with a glance of distress towards the captain. "But the fact is, Miss Lingard—I fear I am bound to tell you at once, so that you make your arrangements—my poor friend, Colonel Lingard, died on Friday night."

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE WELCOME.



THE captain had shut the door, and Christine stood facing Gilbert Greville in the neat little cabin, the light falling full on her face from the port-hole, while Greville was in shadow. So occupied was she with her own thoughts—with the sensation of shock given to her by his piece of news—that she never noticed the eager glance that he cast at her, nor the persistence with which his eyes returned again and again to her troubled face.

Troubled it was now, certainly; but it was the face of the photograph after all. It was the face that had vexed his dreams and haunted his waking hours for some days past: the face which seemed to him a realization of his highest ideal, which satisfied every fastidious instinct and conviction of his soul. It was even more beautiful, to his thinking, with the soft eyes shadowed by grief and amazement, the curved lips trembling, the color coming and going in the delicate cheeks, than in all the passionless serenity of the pictured representation. He looked and looked again, and again the words of old Colonel Lingard seemed to re-echo in his ears: "I want you to turn your back on Daisy Touchwood and marry my niece, Christine."

Turn his back on Daisy Touchwood ! how gladly he would do so if Daisy Touchwood would let him ! But there—as in his own heart he knew too well—there was the difficulty.

“ My uncle dead ! So suddenly ! What was it ? ” she murmured, scarcely knowing in her first dismay what she said.

Greville gave her a short account of the facts, in the version known to the world : that is to say, he said nothing about Florian’s appearance, which had caused the old man such a shock ; but he mentioned the date of the attack, and the time that had elapsed between the seizure and the final close.

“ Then—he was not conscious again ? ” Christine asked.

“ He was conscious once for about five minutes. I was with him, and he charged me to meet you, Miss Lingard, and to be of any use to you that I could. He was a very kind friend to me,” said the young man, with an emotion for which Christine liked him all the better, “ and I shall be only too happy if I can be of any service to his niece.”

“ Thank you—thank you very much. What should I do ? Where ought I to go ? ” said Christine, a little uncertainly. “ Is there any one at his house ? ”


“ Only the servants, and a Greek woman who was meant to be your maid. I had scarcely time to arrange anything, but I saw a friend of Colonel Lingard’s for a moment before I came out—a Mrs. Ferguson, whose house is close to his, and she sent word that she begged you to make her house your home. She would have come herself if there had been time ; but we were afraid that the boat would be in before we could get here.”

“ It is very kind indeed of Mrs. Ferguson,” said Christine with some embarrassment ; “ but I shall only be a trouble to her—had I not better go to some hotel and stay there until—until I can arrange about my return to England ? ”

But this proposition was decidedly negatived by Greville and Captain Marchmont. She could not go to a hotel by herself, she was informed : besides, all the community would be up in arms if she did such a thing. As the niece of so well-known and so popular a man as Colonel Lingard, she would not be permitted to stay anywhere save at one of his friend's houses. Christine listened and suffered herself to be persuaded ; whereupon, her boxes were found to be ready, and she made her farewells to the captain before leaving the ship. She was very pale, and her limbs trembled a good deal as she again crossed the deck. The news of her uncle's death had been a great shock to her, but she earned the approval of the two men who had broken the tidings to her by not shedding any tears. More than once she saw everything as through a mist : the scenes before her seemed unreal and danced before her eyes. But by a strong effort, she controlled herself and made no sign. By Mrs. Vibert and Miss Touchwood she would probably have been pronounced unfeeling ; but the kindly and experienced men who watched her were not so easily led astray, and were only thankful that she was strong and calm.

It seemed like a dream to her to step on shore in so different a spirit from any that she had anticipated ; to be greeted by thoughts of death, by loss and disaster. She had come out, looking for sunshine and summer : she found—what did she find ? what remained in store for her still ?

To Christine's mind, it seemed that nothing remained but a speedy return to the land of her birth, with diminished hopes and possibilities. Yet her spirit revolted against this course : having left England so far behind, she did not care to return so soon. But any such considerations had to be remitted to a future period, for at present Captain Greville claimed her attention.



She was extremely glad of his presence when she found that he knew how to keep off the crowd of shouting, blue-gowned Arabs who clamored for her luggage, that he could convoy her between the Turkish soldiers and custom-house officials without having her boxes opened, and finally place her in an open carriage drawn by two horses and driven by a man in a yellow caftan and an embroidered turban—details which would have confused and bewildered her in her present state of mind, if she had had to attend to them without help. Captain Greville had brought his own servant with him, and he took charge of the luggage in another carriage; while Greville himself, at Christine's own invitation, took a place at her side.

"This is by far the worst quarter of Scanderia," said he, as they drove through various narrow and somewhat squalid-looking streets. "But even here you will probably see things that are new to you."

Yes, that was certain. Even though her heart was heavy and her mind pre-occupied, she could not be unconscious of the strange and charming figures that passed her in the street: stately Moslems with loose black robes over an under-gown of white, and turbans crowning fine dark faces which bore the characteristics of a higher race than that of the low-caste Arabs with bare brown chests and slender limbs showing between the loose folds of their blue cotton gowns; dark-skinned Berbers with thick lips and woolly hair; water-carriers in scarlet and white garments, beating their brass castanets together as they passed along the road—these and other figures passed before Christine's eyes like a vision in a dream.

"Scanderia is not at all Eastern," she heard Captain Greville declaring at her side. "It is not at all an Oriental city, you know—more like Liverpool, they say, than an Eastern town."

Christine turned eyes of silent bewilderment upon him.

It all seemed strange and wonderful to her; for, whether Eastern or not, she had nowhere seen such diversity of costume, such queer projecting windows screened with woodwork for the harems, such strange little wayside booths where men sat cross-legged, sewing, hammering, or smoking and playing with strings of beads. Between the tall houses a strip of cloudless sky was seen: against it a tall minaret stood up tall and white in the noonday brightness, and the weird cry of the muezzin calling faithful ones to prayer rang out over the city streets with the force and clearness of a bell. Christine was too much struck, in spite of her preoccupation, with the novelty of the scene around her, to find space for words; and the rattle of the carriage over the paved streets effectually prevented much conversation. When the European quarter was reached, however, Captain Greville was careful to point out to her the spots where traces of the past Egyptian disturbances had taken place—where fire and shell had burnt and destroyed—where new buildings had been erected in place of old. Christine did not listen very much to all this instructive conversation. Her eyes were busy and her mind was busy too. Even when the town was left behind them, and the broad level road which stretches from Scanderia to Mahatta was reached, she did not at once begin to speak. Here and there, on either side of the road, she caught glimpses of strange and wonderful things: of palm-trees waving in the wind, of sand-hills which were slowly traversed by strangely bedizened camels, water-wheels worked by patient buffaloes, and brown-striped Arab tents inhabited by women in blue veils, who went to and fro with water-jars upon their heads, and by children who either ran about naked, or were clothed from head to foot in long gowns of the most brilliant shades of color. Christine could not help gazing, but when the smooth road with its fringe of tamarisk-trees

lay straight before them, and the noise of the wheels upon the stones had ceased to deafen her ears, she turned to Captain Greville and asked a question.

"My uncle died—last night?"

"Last night at seven o'clock." Then, seeing another inquiry in her eyes, he went on soberly, "The funeral will take place at four o'clock this afternoon."

"So soon?" said Christine, faintly.

"It is the custom in this country."

"I should have liked to see him. I should even like—wish—to see him now—if that is possible."

"It is possible, but not necessary," said Greville, hastily. "Why should you inflict that trial on yourself, Miss Lingard? There is nothing to be gained by it."

"Perhaps not," she answered, softly, "and yet I think that I should like to do it—to see him once at least. It seems hard that he should be put away in the ground without any of his kinsfolk to look at him for the last time, does it not? I never saw him: I do not know very well what he was like; but I think that he would perhaps have wished me to see him if I were here in time."

Greville made some inarticulate answer—he did not quite know what. To him her feeling was quite intelligible and he liked it; he was inclined to think that poor old Colonel Lingard would have liked it too; but he could not easily put his approval into words.

"You knew him very well, did you not?" she asked.

"Yes, fairly well: as well as most people knew him—perhaps better than most. He was not a very easy man to know. Why did you think I knew him well?"

"A lady on board told me so—a Miss Touchwood. She said you were at his house a good deal."

"I wonder what else she said," Greville thought, struck by a touch of reticence and coldness in her tone. "I would give a good deal to know." And his bronzed face

became unaccountably red : so red that Christine noticed the change of color and concluded that Daisy had been correct in calling Captain Greville "a great friend" of hers. Neither cared to pursue the subject. The young man plunged rather eagerly into speech.

"Would you rather go straight to Mrs. Ferguson's house, or to your uncle's?" he asked. "We pass his gate on the way; and I was thinking—there would not be much time——"

"Let us go there first, then. I will go to Mrs. Ferguson's when I have seen my uncle's face."

They drove on almost in silence, until they reached the straggling houses, white, pink, yellow washed buildings on the shores of the blue Mediterranean, which constituted the village of Mahatta; and at the gate of one of these houses, the carriage stopped. Greville helped Christine to descend, told the driver to wait, and then escorted her up the shady garden-paths, where little trickling streams in the water-courses kept the plants green and the flowers fragrant beneath the palms and plantains. She saw little of the garden or the outside aspect of the house just then, for her eyes had filled with sudden tears—not of sorrow for herself, but sorrow for the dead man who had been swept away at the very moment when he was devising reparation for a wrong which he had done in the years gone by.

The servants, with timid, frightened faces, came forward to kiss her hand and touch their foreheads with it in sign of allegiance and service, but when this was done, Greville waved them aside. He knew what arrangements had been made and where he meant to take Miss Lingard; there was no need for any one to interfere.

The dead man's face was not yet covered. It looked infinitely more placid, more noble, than Greville had ever seen it look in life. He was almost pleased that she should

see him like this ; that in the days to come, when she reaped the benefit of the wealth that he had, without doubt, heaped upon her, she would be able to remember his countenance as fixed forever in the solemn majesty given to it by death.

Christine stooped and kissed him in his coffin. "Oh, I wish I had known him—I wish I had seen him for a little time at least, before he died ! It is so sad that he has gone away from me like this !"

The tears started and fell on her uncle's cold, white face : she had spoken with more abandonment of herself, more warmth and naturalness than she usually allowed herself to show to strangers. Greville felt strangely moved and drawn towards her, as though by a common bond.

"He was my friend too," he said in a low voice, looking down at the inanimate figure before them. "I shall miss him more than you, because I knew him—I knew his real goodness of heart. I had a great respect and liking for him."

"Thank you," Christine said. The soberly worded testimony was grateful to her ears.

It was enough. They turned to leave the room ; but at the door they were confronted by a figure, whose presence made Greville's eyes dilate with indignant anger, while Christine involuntarily retreated a step or two in dismay. They saw before them Paul Florian, with an evil and mocking smile upon his olive face.

CHAPTER X.

MY COUSIN.

"WHAT are you doing here? What business have you in the room?" queried Captain Greville. His voice was scarcely raised above a whisper, and yet it contained, most unmistakably, the suggestion of a threat. It seemed to Christine that there was thunder in the air. For the first moment she had been startled and repelled by a look of evil, of malignity, of insolent triumph, in the handsome dark face that had intruded itself upon the solitude of the chamber of death at so inopportune a time; then she recovered her self-possession and concluded that the man must be a servant. He had the cringing, fawning air, which often characterises men of his race; and she did not know what his red cap or *tarboosh* signified; probably in her opinion, some especial form of servitude, and was by no means the universal official badge which it forms in Egypt and Turkey.

"If you have business here," she said, involuntarily assuming the quiet tone of distance suitable to a presuming inferior, "it would have been better to knock and tell us that you desired to enter. But the arrangements are in *your* hand, Captain Greville, I believe. Will you please ask why we have been intruded on in this way?"

The last few words were uttered in a lower tone and possibly not meant for Florian's hearing at all, but he did hear, and a gleam of malignant hate shot from his eyes.

"Step outside and say what you have to say," Greville

said to the former secretary, still, in a low key. He had not seen Florian since Colonel Lingard's death until now.

"Certainly I will step outside," said Florian, bowing and smiling, but keeping his hand on the door in a disagreeably masterful way, as though he had the right to regulate the entrance and exit of visitors. "There are a few little things to be said which are perhaps not quite suitable for this room."

"Miss Lingard," said Greville, turning to her and speaking with marked deference, "would you like me to take you at once to Mrs. Ferguson's, or will you rest for a few minutes in the drawing-room, while I inquire whether there is really any business that needs to be done at once?"

"I will wait," said Christine. "Please do not let me be a hindrance to you."

Greville opened the drawing-room door and showed her in. To his infinite surprise and indignation, they were followed closely by the secretary, who came in and stood near the door with the same odd smile of evil meaning on his handsome, crafty face. Gilbert flashed a look and a word at him, as he might have done to a troublesome dog.

"Stay outside," he said.

Christine was almost startled to hear him speak so harshly. She did not then know, as she knew afterwards, that he used that tone because of the man's character, not because of his position in the world.

Again to Greville's surprise, for Florian had always hitherto been easily cowed, the secretary did not move an inch, but opened his mouth to speak.

"You mistake my position, Captain Greville," he said, with an irritating suavity. "You have been kind enough to take the management of Colonel Lingard's affairs upon yourself with an industry and devotion for which his

family owe you many thanks, although the position you have assumed is one that rightfully belongs to *me*."

"Miss Lingard, you are in command here," said Greville, keeping his temper with difficulty, and turning quietly to the girl as she sat in a large cushioned chair near the centre of the room, looking (he thought to himself) like a queen, sovereign over the hearts and fates of men. There was an unconscious graceful dignity about Christine which had often charmed others as it charmed Greville now. His voice took an accent of unusual softness and deference as he spoke. "*You* represent your uncle, to whom Mr. Florian here was once secretary. If Mr. Florian wants payment for his services, or has any accounts to render, do you authorize me to act for you?"

"Certainly, Captain Greville. I shall be much obliged to you if you will."

"Then—" said Greville. But Florian interrupted him with a mocking little laugh.

"Excuse me, madame, you also are under a mistake. The person in command is not Colonel Lingard's niece, but Colonel Lingard's son." He laid his hand on his heart and bowed with an affectation of humility, but his brilliant dark eyes flashed with an unholy triumph. "Colonel Lingard's son—my unworthy self," he added. "And heir, as I have reason to believe, to his house and other possessions."

"You liar!" Greville hissed between his teeth. He was well-nigh beside himself with rage, and at a word from Christine he would have sprung on the Levantine and hurled him to the ground. But a gesture from her restrained him, and he kept himself back, although his limbs quivered with the desire of vengeance, like those of an eager hound held in a leash by his master's hand.

He looked at Christine for instructions—it seemed quite natural already to turn to her for these.

She had risen to her feet, and, drawn up to her full height, towered above the shrinking, under-sized Florian (now half afraid of what he had done) like a veritable Juno or Diana. Her face had flushed a little: her eyes shone, and her lips were firmly set.

"I do not believe you," she said. "My uncle was an honorable man. You—*you*—cannot be his son."

The immeasurable scorn expressed in her accents made even Florian wince. He threw out the palms of his hands and raised his shoulders to his ears with a deprecatory gesture.

"Madame, I assure you I do but proclaim a fact. I have the necessary papers: I will submit them to the Courts—they will decide. My mother was a Greek: Colonel Lingard married her in Chios many years ago. She died when I was a child: my father——"

"Is it necessary that I should hear all this?" said Christine, turning in a sort of dull anger to Greville, whose brow was black as night.

"No, indeed: quite unnecessary. Have the goodness to leave the room, sir: the lady does not want you any longer," he said, addressing Florian in his most military manner. "You had better leave the house too—if you don't wish to be turned out by the servants—the *other* servants," he added, with some emphasis.

"You will not listen to my story? You refuse to hear? You call that English justice and courage and honesty?" said the man. His eyes began to flame, his very mustache seemed to bristle and curl upward like the whiskers of an angry cat. He looked so menacing and so repellent in spite of his manifest beauty of feature, that Christine's momentary pity for him which had crossed her mind faded into dislike and apprehension. At the same time she could not but acknowledge that there was some truth in his complaint. If there was anything for her to know, it

was better to hear it at once than to let it hang over her indefinitely like a thunder-cloud. She sat down again and folded her hands before her.

"I am ready to listen," she said, quietly, "if you have anything to tell that we ought to hear. It shall never be said that we were afraid to hear the truth."

"This man never spoke the truth in his life," Greville muttered in her ear.

"Nevertheless, for my uncle's sake, we will hear what he has to say," said Christine, resolutely. "Only he must understand that nothing can be taken on hearsay: he must make all his statements good."

Florian bowed ironically. "I am much obliged to the lady and gentleman for their good opinion of me. I never hoped much from Captain Greville's assistance, but I think that *my cousin* may have the generosity to hear me."

Gilbert started violently: he looked at Christine as if he longed to speak but did not like to do so without her permission. She turned crimson and then pale, but it was with perfect calm that she raised her eyes to Florian's face and looked at it attentively.

"You claim to be my cousin," she said. "You do not look to me like the son of an Englishman; but that may be only my ignorance. Tell me your story: there ought to be no difficulty in proving it if it is true."

"Pardon me, Miss Lingard," Greville interposed: "would it not be better if the story were told to your uncle's lawyer, or to one of his old friends before you heard it?" He colored a little as he spoke: he did not like to say that he was afraid that the story might contain details which would shock the delicate feelings of an English girl.

"I am not afraid of what I may hear," said Christine, who, understood him perfectly. "He will tell his story to

my uncle's friends afterwards ; but I should like to hear it first. Go on, please." And turning to Florian, she raised her serious beautiful eyes to his face, and waited for the story to begin.

The man's lips twitched a little nervously under his dark mustache. A momentary hesitation, a quick glance at Greville, showed that he would have preferred that gentleman's absence before he told his story : he was afraid of Greville, as indeed he had cause to be. Finding, however, that the captain was not disposed either to retire from the scene or to make further objections to listening to his recital, he bowed submissively and began to speak.

"It is now many years ago," he said, "since Colonel Lingard, then a subaltern in the —th Regiment, chose to spend a few weeks' leave in cruising about the Mediterranean, and staying here and there at various Greek islands. It was at Chios that he met my mother. She was the daughter of a vine-grower—a man who could trace his lineage back to the noblest of Greek families, but poor and unlearned, and, therefore, despised by the proud Englishman,"—he said this with a sneer which made Christine wince, and Greville look at him vengefully—"who, nevertheless, thought it no shame to make love to his daughter. She was beautiful, as I have heard ; but she had the temper of a fiend. I know that to my cost, for I lived twelve years of my life with her. So—though Oliver Lingard married her, he could not live with her. He married her at the British Consulate—I've got the papers here and the dates ; and then—after a few weeks—he sailed away and left her with her friends."

"Do you mean to say that he abandoned her ?" Christine asked, indignantly. Somehow this story of her uncle's past had an incredible sound.

"No, not altogether. He came to see her again and

again : he provided for her and for me. Here are copies of his letters : I have the originals also—in a safe place. When my mother died, he sent me to school and college, then placed me in an office in Trieste. You can ascertain all these facts for yourselves : they were not done in secret. Some time ago he sent for me to live here, as his secretary : he promised to do me justice and to make me known to the world as his son ; but he died—it is now too late—therefore I claim my own rights.”

He spoke with the foreign accent which increased perceptibly when he was excited : he moved his hands with the eloquent gesture of the born orator. In spite of herself, Christine was impressed. It seemed to her that the man was speaking truth. She glanced at Greville, and saw from his face that he was troubled. His anger was gone, and he looked simply distressed—this was a sign that he almost believed Florian’s story.

Her glance seemed to him like an appeal for help, and he at once asked a pertinent question.

“What motive had Colonel Lingard for keeping your relationship to him a secret?”

Florian shrugged his shoulders, and threw up his hands deprecatingly.

“How can I tell ? It is not for me to suggest that he was ashamed of his own actions—or of his wife and son.” But he spoke with such cynical bitterness that for the moment even Christine felt sorry for his position. Greville, however, showed no sympathy.

“If Colonel Lingard has left a will, as I believe is the case,” he said abruptly, “your position may not necessarily be altered.”

“You mean that he may have left all his money to this young lady ?” said Florian, with a curious, sneering smile. He bowed to Christine as if acknowledging her claims, and then resumed : “Unfortunately for your supposition

Colonel Lingard was not so provident for the future as you may have hoped. My father left no will, and therefore all his possessions will pass into the hands of his legitimate son and heir."

"You will have to prove your position first, sir!" said Greville, angrily.

"I am prepared to do that. I mean to put my papers into the proper hands at once."

"In that case, Miss Lingard," said Greville, pointedly, "our business with Mr. Florian is ended for the present."

Christine rose to her feet at once. "Certainly," she said.

"Allow me. I have a word to say to Miss Lingard. Mademoiselle," said Florian, growing more and more foreign in manner and accent as he became apparently moved by some new and explicable emotion, "may I not assure you of my most earnest desire to remain your friend? I advance my claim in the interests of justice: let that be allowed, and you will find me always ready to behave with generosity. I have no unfriendly spirit towards you: may I not hope that you will extend some friendliness of feeling towards me?"

Christine hesitated. She felt instinctively that the nature of all her future relations with this man depended upon the answer that she should make him now. And yet she could not speak—she could not make up her mind as to what she ought to say.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW FRIENDS.

GREVILLE saved her the trouble of deciding. He opened the door for her, and made a sudden imperious gesture, intimating that she should walk forward. Christine was almost grateful for the imperiousness, although it was strange to her. She had never been dominated in her life : just now, however, it was pleasant to be controlled.

"If I may advise you, Miss Lingard, your future intercourse with Mr. Florian should be conducted through a lawyer."

"Indeed I think that would be best," said Christine in a low voice. Then her heart smote her a little for unkindness, and she glanced over her shoulder at the slender, foreign-looking, olive-faced man, whose attitude struck her for the first time as somewhat desolate and melancholy. After all, if his story were true, was *he* to blame? She turned round and faced him again, with something of pity in her eyes.

"I will try to believe that you want justice only," she said, "and that you mean no ill by me and mine. That is all that you can expect me to say just yet."

"All? More!" cried the young man, flushing up with an excitement of manner which looked more natural than his previous cynicism and air of *savoir faire*. "More than I could have hoped! Ah, mademoiselle, when you acknowledge me to be your cousin, I shall know how to thank you!"

"Why did you say so much to him?" said Greville in

a vexed tone, as he followed his companion through the gloom of the shaded hall to the wide piazza, flooded with sunlight, from which the garden path was reached by broad stone steps. "He is a rank impostor: you ought not to have spoken so kindly: he will only think that you are afraid of him—that you are weak."

At an ordinary time Christine would have been offended at this dictatorial tone, now she only smiled slightly, as she replied,

"The man does not seem to me like an impostor. He may be able to prove his words. And if so—he is my cousin."

"Your cousin! It is impossible—quite impossible. You do not know the man—I do. I have seen the terms on which he stood with the colonel, and I *know* the contempt in which the colonel held him. Why, only on the night of his illness——"

He stopped short suddenly. It was not fair to accuse this man of his past misdeeds to a woman; and he felt a little ashamed of himself for it. He had been thinking of Florian as of a paid subordinate whose faults were no secret; but he was trying to put himself on the plane of equality with Greville now, and must therefore be judged by a different standard.

"Yes? on the night of his illness?" asked Christine.

"Well—oh, only that Colonel Lingard was displeased with him," said Greville, lamely. "I only meant that the colonel did not seem to like him much."

"Whether we like him or not has nothing much to do with the question, has it?"

"No—but whether he is an honorable man and a gentleman has a good deal."

They had by this time come out of the garden door at the foot of the hill. A white road, bordered by stone wall over which the scent of roses was wafted to the nostrils

from innumerable garden-beds, stretched to the right hand and the left. The carriage was still waiting in the road, and a couple of Arab children, clad in yellow and red caf-tans respectively and with white caps on their heads, stood on the pavement staring at the strangers. Again Christine felt the shock of the unknown, the foreign element in her life. Above her the sky was blue, but not with an English blueness: an odd-looking lizard ran across her path: the blank-looking house just opposite the gate showed by its closely-shuttered windows that it was tenanted by somebody's harem. Yes, she was in a strange country, and all her life was becoming strange as well—strangest of all was it that Gilbert Greville, a man whom she had known for so few hours, should speak to her in that softened, caressing voice!

"I wish you would promise me," he was saying, "that you won't trust to anything that man says without consultation with—with your friends. And amongst your friends, you will count me, will you not?"

"Yes, I will count you," said Christine, unsteadily. She did not know why this tremor had crept into her voice; why, in spite of her recent loss and disappointment she felt a certain sense of rest and peace; why the strange scenery around her suddenly became home-like and beautiful. Possibly—when she reasoned about it, she thought—possibly, the change came with the warmth of heart that often accompanies a declaration of friendship. Only friendship: she went no further: she did not say of "love." But the feeling in Gilbert's heart came perilously near being described by that word.

They had but a few steps to go before reaching Mrs. Ferguson's house, which, as Christine involuntarily noticed, was not unlike her uncle's in shape and size, and had, like his, a long garden stretching from the hill-top to the road. Mrs. Ferguson herself was waiting in the

hall : she came forward and took Christine by both hands, kissing her affectionately on both cheeks as if she were an old friend, and then drawing her into a pretty little sitting-room. She was a woman of more than middle life elaborately dressed, frizzed, curled, and ornamented, to a degree that struck Christine as somewhat unusual, yet with an honest friendliness in her handsome eyes, and an immense kindliness of manner.

"My dear, come in and sit down. What a sad arrival this must be for you ! I would have come myself to meet you if I had had time to get off, but really everything was so sudden, so unexpected ! You must stay here as long as ever you like : look upon this house as your home : I shall be delighted to have you here as long as ever you like to stay."

"Thank you," Christine said faintly. She found it rather difficult to keep the tears out of her eyes, at the sound of these kindly words. She sank down in the seat which Mrs. Ferguson had drawn forward, and was glad to close her eyes for a moment, for a curious sense of fatigue was stealing over her. When she opened them again, she saw that Mrs. Ferguson had disappeared and that Captain Greville was standing beside her and looking dreadfully alarmed. She smiled, and the smile reassured him.

"Are you better ? I really thought you were going to faint. Mrs. Ferguson's gone to fetch you a glass of water."

"I never fainted in my life. I only felt tired for a moment."

"No wonder, after all you have undergone. Very few women could have borne it as you have done."

She had no time to reply. Mrs. Ferguson was back like a benevolent whirlwind, followed by servants bearing brass trays laden with glasses, carafes and liqueurs of

different kinds. Christine had once more a vague sense of living in the Arabian Nights: she was not yet accustomed to these brown-faced servingmen, shod with silence, as they seemed, and clad in brilliant hues.

Captain Greville was pressed to stay to luncheon, but refused the invitation, somewhat to Christine's disappointment. She felt already as if he were an old friend, and she should be a little desolate when he left. Another short absence of Mrs. Ferguson—this time in order to look after the luggage—gave her opportunity for a quiet word or two with him.

"Mrs. Ferguson is very kind. Will she tell me about hotels or boarding houses—where I could stay?"

"No, I don't think she will," said Gilbert, laughing as he answered. "She will be awfully offended if you don't stay here. Why should you not? She was a great friend of your uncle's."

"She is most kind, but I hardly like——"

"The whole community would be scandalized if you went to a hotel. Don't think so badly of Egyptian hospitality, Miss Lingard. Promise me you will stay for the present, at any rate, or I shall go away with a very uneasy mind."

"You do not know how independent I am, nor how well used to taking care of myself," said Christine, brightening a little under the influence of his pleasant, gentle voice. "But if you think I ought to stay here for a day or two, I will do so," she added with a touch of submissiveness which delighted the young man.

"I am sure you ought. And Mrs. Ferguson will be only too pleased to do anything she can for you."

Christine felt sure of that. She felt comforted, however, by his assurance of the fact, and was the more ready to listen when Mrs. Ferguson devoted herself to her entertainment, and showed a remarkable knowledge of her neigh-

bors' affairs, which she proceeded to impart to Christine, at once, by way of giving her some idea of the place and its society.

A little quiet time for repose and thought was what Christine desired rather than gossip, but this was not yet to be obtained. She asked about the funeral, and was told that it would take place at four o'clock that afternoon. It was with some diffidence that she declared her intention of being present, but she saw that this was not so unusual a thing as it would have been in England, and that her hostess's husband, who was a Bey, high up in the Turkish service, was quite prepared to support her in her resolve.

So at four o'clock, she was driven in a closed carriage to the Protestant cemetery, a plot of ground so rich in roses and oleanders, honeysuckle and stephanotis, that it looked more like a garden than a graveyard. There was a great crowd of Europeans, who had come to do honor to Colonel Lingard's memory ; but Christine, through her thick veil, saw only two faces that she knew—those of Captain Greville, her friend, and Florian, her enemy. It was thus that she named them in her mind.

Mrs. Ferguson, although deeply disliking anything mournful, or anything connected with death, had nevertheless bravely stuck to Christine's elbow during the ceremony, and was quite ready to take her in her arms, fondle and cry over her, during the drive home. It was characteristic of Mrs. Ferguson that she slipped easily and delightedly into the position of Christine's chaperon, companion and friend. She was immensely pleased that Captain Greville should have appealed to her for help, and that Colonel Lingard's niece should be brought to her house. It showed that she was of importance, that she was a woman of standing and position. Besides, she had none of her nieces staying with her that winter, and

her house had therefore been shorn of its principal attraction. Mrs. Ferguson liked to have her drawing-room crowded on her "day," and her tennis-ground full of young people. If Christine had been a plain girl, Mrs. Ferguson might not have felt quite so hospitably towards her. But apart from these worldly motives, there was a certain amount of real kindness and good feeling at work in the good lady's heart, and she was very glad that benevolence was made easy to her by the facts of Christine's beauty and probable wealth.

For as yet nobody had mentioned Florian's pretensions to her, nor the absence of a will.

She was a little disappointed by Christine's silence and reserve. She would have liked the girl to confide in her at once, to pour out on her bosom the tale of her disappointments and her griefs; and she was puzzled by the absence of demonstrativeness. Being very quick to make theories and jump to conclusions, she had at once conceived the idea of a possible marriage between Christine and Gilbert; and she was quite chagrined, therefore, when the girl retired to her room almost immediately after dinner in spite of the fact that Captain Greville had dined with them and brought some letters which had been awaiting Christine's arrival at her uncle's house. It was these letters which gave her a pretext for retiring, and Greville took his leave soon afterwards.

"A sweet girl!" Mrs. Ferguson ejaculated to her husband, when they were left alone. "What a sad thing it is for her, poor thing!"

"She is a very handsome girl: I don't know anything about her being sweet," said Mr. Ferguson, a man of discrimination, generally known in Scanderia as Ferguson Bey.

"What, James! don't you think her amiable or something? To be sure she is very reserved," said his wife,

beginning to hedge as soon as she saw that there was a possible difference of opinion, "but I hope she won't turn out sulky or bad-tempered."

"Oh dear no, I meant nothing of that kind. Only that she is a girl of character—not a nonentity."

"And a very good thing too. I wonder, what she will do with all that money."

"We don't know yet that Lingard left it to her."

"My dear James, what else should he do with it? She has a mother and sister, I believe, and no doubt they will come in for a share; but what else should he bring her out here for, unless he meant to make her his heiress! It would be sheer absurdity."

"Well, I hope it is all right. She is a girl who looks as if she ought to have a fortune."

"How long will it be before she can take possession, James?"

"Oh, not long. I don't know exactly."

"You don't object to her being here, do you? I should like to show her every civility in my power. I should think she would write to her mother and sisters to come out, and they would occupy Colonel Lingard's house for the winter. I shall suggest that to her. And in the meantime she could stay here."

"You have designs on her already, Milly!" said her husband, shaking his head.

"Only for her good, Jim dear. Such a girl as that—with her good looks and her fortune—ought not to be difficult to settle in the world. There's Gilbert Greville: I can see he is very much taken with her."

"But Greville's bespoke," said Mr. Ferguson. "Daisy Touchwood came back from Naples to-day."

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER FROM HOME.

UNCONSCIOUS of the plans which were being woven around her, Christine sat in her own room, and looked out upon the star-lit night. The moon was not in its glory, as it had been upon the evening when her uncle talked with Greville about her, less than a week ago ; but the stars had a brilliance to which she was unaccustomed, and the sea broke with a soothing murmur on the sand outside the garden wall. She opened her window and unfastened the shutters, reckless of mosquitoes in wait, and flying beetles such as came with a skirl and a thud to any place where lamps attracted them by their light ; and for some little time, she sat with her elbows on the window sill and her chin upon her hands, in an attitude of unusual languor. The events of the day, so strange, so unexpected, had produced in her a sensation of great fatigue ; and she was glad to get away from Mrs. Ferguson's well-intentioned prattle, and the lights of the drawing-room, to a place where she could at least have silence and peace. The house, like most of the houses, was of one story only, and her window looked out upon a veranda ; but fortunately for her, the veranda was untenanted, and nothing came to her ears save the long roll of the waves, and the flapping of the palm branches in the garden. This silence was grateful to her tired nerves, and it was with a deep sigh, that she at last roused herself to look at the letters which Greville had put into her hand.

She placed a small lamp on a table beside her, and

opened the envelope which bore her mother's handwriting. It contained nothing but the fondest commonplaces, gentle hopes that she was enjoying herself, and a little village news. Yet Christine read it once, twice, thrice, before she laid it down. It was not so much what was said as the spirit of the letter that struck her : it seemed to her to show something of melancholy and depression, something intangible to any one not possessed by a loving daughter's penetration. Christine was puzzled, and laid it down at last in the hope that her other letters might solve the mystery.

Sylvia's did not. Sylvia spoke only of her lover and the parish. It was with an odd little constriction of the heart that Christine read it, but she smiled nevertheless when she put it down, and remained motionless for a minute or two with her hands folded before her on her lap. She was thinking how strange it was that she had scarcely remembered John Arbuthnot's existence during the last few days. The old life at home already seemed far way ; and the passing fancy that had disturbed her peace for a time was fading like the memory of a dream.

Last of all, she opened Nell's letter. She was surprised to see that it was a very long one. Nelly was not given to the writing of long letters, unless she had something very important indeed to say. Christine wondered, and began to read.

"DEAREST CHRISTINE :

"I suppose you will be in the land of Egypt when you get our letters. It is well to be you. I believe it has rained every day since you left home, and it is bitterly cold. Mother has had neuralgia, and Sylvia and I have both caught frightful colds in the head, and do nothing but sneeze. Is it really warm and bright in your part of this world ? One can hardly believe it."

" Really warm and bright ? "—Christine looked up with a momentary smile and thought of the roses and jasmine which she had seen that day, of the balmy airs that stole across her cheek as she sat facing the starlit Mediterranean : she smiled, but she sighed as well, thinking of the dead man who had left sunshine and flowers behind him, of the thousands who lived a life of toil and darkness and never knew what the beauty of sunlight meant.

" The worst of the weather is," wrote Nell, " that it depresses us all, especially mother ; but it is not to be denied that she has something to be depressed about. I don't know whether she intends telling you what it is, but I rather think she does not, as she fancies it will spoil your enjoyment. Now I think that is nonsense, because you are too fond of mother not to guess that she is troubled about something, and therefore you will be more anxious than you need be and will not enjoy yourself at all. Miss Barnett always used to say that I had not a logical mind ; but I am sure *that* is logical enough, is it not ? "

" Quite logical, dear Nell ! " said Christine to herself. But her brows contracted and she read on hastily.

" It is only money-matters, fortunately. Mother has lost some more money, and she says that her income will now be very tiny. She wants to make all the economies that she can ; and I believe, although it is not quite decided yet, that Sylvia will actually be married before the New Year. Then mother thinks we might let the house for a few months, and go to Bournemouth, or even the South of France, until you came home again, when we should be able to consult as to our future habitation. It is a very lucky thing that Uncle Oliver's invitation came to you just now, as of course *you* are provided for until spring, at any rate. Mother is dreadfully afraid that one of us will have to go out as a governess or something desperate (as she considers it) of that kind ; and I believe she

hopes that Uncle Oliver will ask you out to Egypt every winter and behave quite like the rich uncle in a story book.

"Now you must not immediately imagine that it would be of any use to rush home again, with the vain idea of being helpful to dear mother. I know that is the idea which will immediately occur to you, but I assure you that it wouldn't do a bit of good. It is mother's one ray of comfort that you are away, and enjoying that lovely climate and having a thorough change. So stay away as long as you can. As a practical way of looking at the matter, I may remark that it would do mother a lot of good to go to Cannes, and that *two* could afford it while *three* could not, in the present state of our finances. I hope this does not sound hard-hearted, but it is meant to relieve your mind."

Christine put the letter away from her, and lost herself in a maze of conflicting emotions and sentiments. It was evident that Nell, in her precocious wisdom, had hit the right nail on the head, and also that she had very vague ideas as to the way in which her communication would strike Christine. Poor Christine felt, for the moment at least, much more hurt by her mother's reticence than distressed by the loss of money. When she was at home, her mother had always told her everything: now, because she was in Egypt, was she to be left out of the family councils? She *ought* to be told: it was as important for her to know what her mother and sisters were doing, as if she were living in the same house.

She was unhinged, over-excited, by the events of the day, or she would never have taken her mother's tender consideration for her enjoyment as an injury. But, just for the moment, she felt it in this way. She was hurt, indignant, sorry, all at once. She did what tranquil

Christine was seldom seen to do : she shed some hot, angry tears over the want of confidence in her that her mother seemed to have shown.

But when the tears were over, her reason told her that she had been foolish. It must be confessed that Christine's serenity and good sense, although extremely real, were somewhat exaggerated by members of her family, who were apt to take it for granted that she was superior to most sublunary matters, and did not feel things as other people do. In reality, she was a girl of strong, warm feelings, which she did not often express, having grown into the habit of controlling them for the sake of others—for the sake of a delicate mother, for instance, and of two younger sisters who had to be influenced for good. Now that she was away from them, she became conscious of some very violent and uncomfortable sensations of various human passions from which she had thought that she was exempt ; and she was a little bit shocked and astonished at herself.

On this night of her arrival at Mrs. Ferguson's, she had been unreasonable, jealous, selfish. Was not Nell right in saying that it was well for her to be away just now ? Why, then, should it have seemed a little hard ?

Then she began, with a startled feeling, to go over the facts of the case. She recognized now that she was in an awkward and painful position. She should have to write home at once and announce her uncle's death,—in fact, she must telegraph, for the news of his decease must have been already reported to the daily papers,—and tell her mother that she was coming home again by the next steamer. That they had not benefited, probably, by her uncle's decease, was not an item that troubled her. They had not counted on his dying, nor on inheriting from him ; but they had counted on Christine's staying in Egypt for the winter, and their plans would be materially altered by

her return. For, as Nell had said, two could go to Cannes, but "three" would be out of the question. Christine might return in time to go to Cannes with her mother instead of Nell: but that would hardly be fair to Nell; or, she knew she might count on being invited to the Arbuthnots' for the winter; but that would be impossible. She did not feel as if it would be pleasant for her to spend weeks and months in John Arbuthnot's house just yet. By and by she might not care; but she did not want to do it yet.

But what, then, was she to do? For the first time, a solution of the difficulty flashed across Christine's mind. Why should she not stay in Egypt after all? Was it not possible that she could get something to do, as governess, companion, nurse? Something that would pay her expenses, and leave her free to send money home instead of consuming what would be so useful to her mother and sisters? She still had forty pounds remaining of the check that Colonel Lingard had sent to her; if she had not yet to go home she might spare thirty pounds at least of it for her mother's needs, and earn her living and her passage home in the spring for herself. Would it be possible to do this? she wondered. At any rate she might try.

What would her friends say? What would this new found friend of hers—this man with the kindly eyes and pleasant, persuasive face think of this plan of hers? Would he approve?

"There is not the slightest reason why I should consult Captain Greville," said Christine to herself, with an unreasonable flush of rebellion. "Why should I tell him anything about it? I promised to consult him about anything that that man said to me, but not about all the affairs of my life. That would be absurd!"

And yet it seemed to her as if she again heard sounding in her ears the words that thrilled her that morning more

than she would have liked to own—"Amongst your friends you will count me, will you not?" Yes, she did count Gilbert Greville amongst her friends, and deep in her heart of hearts she knew that although she might pretend outwardly to disregard his approval, she would like to have it, and she would like to ask his advice.

There was Mrs. Ferguson, too,—she would perhaps help her. Christine felt a little doubtful, however, of Mrs. Ferguson's help. She knew that it was a much easier thing to be civil to Colonel Lingard's niece and possible heiress, than to assist a poor and struggling young woman, of whom nothing was positively known, to a situation. Still, Mrs. Ferguson might be useful, and Christine made up her mind to consult her on the following day.

"In Cairo, I might find something to do, perhaps," she thought, as at last she closed the jalousies and began to undress. "There are so many English people in Cairo; while here——"

She stopped short and stood motionless, looking absently at her own reflection in the looking-glass. Another train of thought had suddenly been suggested to her, and made her forget everything beside.

If she went to Cairo, she must leave behind her several things and persons in whom she was interested. This man, Florian, as Greville had told her to call him, was setting up his pretensions to rank as Colonel Lingard's son. Christine did not know whether his claim were likely to be true or false; but Captain Greville disbelieved it, and that went a long way with her. If it were false, ought she to go away and leave him quietly to take possession of her uncle's house and fortune? Was there no way by which she herself could investigate his claims, and prove that he was an impostor? It was not for her own sake that she wanted to do this: it was for her mother's. If this man had not appeared, the probability

was that Colonel Lingard's money would have come to his brother's widow and children; and then, as Christine reflected, there would not have been this horrible necessity for her weak and delicate mother to be troubled about money-matters, nor for their dear old home to be broken up and the house let to strangers.

"I do not mind for myself, I can work," said Christine, looking steadily at the fair image in the mirror, "but for my mother's sake, I would do almost anything to put this wrong right. For it is a wrong; I am certain of it. I do not believe that my uncle would deceive the world in this way for so many years. It is another reason for staying in Egypt on any terms—even if I have to be a servant in order to stay! I will not go away until I am quite convinced that this man is or is not my uncle's son. I must be *sure*."

And then she at last made herself ready for the night, and, lying down beneath the white mosquito net, slept heavily, from very weariness, until the morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

CHRISTINE did not notify her intentions to Mrs. Ferguson on the day after her arrival, as she had meant to do, for the simple reason that she was utterly unable to lift her head from her pillow. A racking headache, accompanied by a touch of fever, probably brought on by over-excitement and distress of mind, reduced her to a very low ebb of strength and spirits, and made her thankful to lie quiet in a darkened room without speaking a word.

Mrs. Ferguson came and went, tending her with the greatest assiduity and tenderness. Christine was vaguely grateful, but for some days she was not strong enough to express her gratitude. She could only lie still and inhale the fragrance of the lovely flowers that Captain Greville persisted in sending to her day by day. But by the time she was well enough to sit up and join the family circle, she had grown to look upon Mrs. Ferguson as an old friend, and to think with positive regret of the day when she must quit her house.

"My dear, I shall be very glad to have you here as long as you like," Mrs. Ferguson said to her warmly.

"You are most kind," Christine answered, with equal cordiality, "but I must either go back to England or do something for myself out here."

Whereat Mrs. Ferguson marvelled, for Christine in her grace and refinement, did not give her the idea of poverty, and she wondered whether the girl were really in need of money, or whether she was staying away from her family in a freak. The latter explanation struck her as the one most likely to excite interest on Christine's behalf in general society, and as she was not troubled by scruples about veracity when a project for her own or others, welfare was concerned, she speedily made the most of it. Miss Lingard was therefore reputed in Mahatta society to be a beautiful and charming girl who had had a difference with her family, who had therefore accepted her uncle's invitation to come to Egypt, and who wished to remain there for the winter even at the cost of doing something for her own support. This story was quite possible, and sounded better than the plain unvarnished truth that the Lingards were poor and that Christine talked of turning governess in order to help her family.

Christine knew nothing of this little fiction, wherewith

the worldly-wise Mrs. Ferguson relieved the monotony of her days, and was beginning to think of taking energetic steps towards finding employment for herself. She was in the midst of a consultation with her hostess on this matter one morning, when a servant appeared with a card on a salver, which he first handed to Mrs. Ferguson with a few words in Arabic, and then to Miss Lingard. Christine looked at the card, colored high, and glanced at Mrs. Ferguson.

"Mr. Florian Lingard," she said. "Why should he call on me?"

"Is there not something written on the card in pencil?" said Mrs. Ferguson, whose quick eye had discerned something that Christine had overlooked. The girl lifted the card again and read these words aloud:

"I implore you to see me for a few minutes. My only desire is to do justice to everyone. P. F. L."

"What impudence!" said Mrs. Ferguson, indignantly. "Why should he ask to see you? Let him do justice through his lawyers if he likes. What shall you say, dear?"

"I don't know. I think perhaps I had better see him. It may save trouble in the end."

"Shall I stay in the room with you? Just as you like, you know," said Mrs. Ferguson, who would have given her right hand to be present at the interview.

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Ferguson. I shall be much obliged to you if you will stay."

But, greatly to Mrs. Ferguson's disappointment, it was found on the entrance of the visitor, that he desired to speak to Miss Lingard in private; and, very reluctantly, the good lady withdrew.

Florian Lingard—to give him the name which he claimed—remained standing until she had gone; then turned to Christine with a low bow, and at her invitation

took a seat facing her. The room was darkened slightly, as most rooms are in that part of the world, but he sat where his own face was in a shadow, while that of Christine was turned towards the light. For a moment he regarded her in silence. She was dressed in black and wore no ornaments, but even this mourning garb did not detract from her beauty. Her white skin, softly touched with shell-like pink, was thrown into vivid relief by the sombre black gown; her wealth of thick, soft, brown hair, her steady beautiful eyes, seemed to give all the color that the picture required. She was not of the type that Florian Lingard had been in the habit of admiring: nevertheless he said to himself that she was a very beautiful woman, and that it would be to his advantage if he could get her on his side. Though how this was to be accomplished without surrendering his fortune, Mr. Florian Lingard was not as yet prepared to say.

It might have been embarrassing to some men in similar circumstances, that Christine should wait for him to open the conversation; but Florian Lingard was not easily embarrassed.

"Mademoiselle," he began, with his ready smile and bow, "I have to ask your pardon for thus, as it were, forcing my way to your presence. It seemed to me better that we should confer together, face to face, if not as friends, then as foes—honest and honorable foes—though I do not abandon the hope that some day we may count ourselves friends."

He spoke English remarkably well. This was the only impression that he had produced so far on Christine's mind. She felt that she ought to reply, but she found it a difficult task.

"You have something to say to me?" she asked, coldly. "Could it not be said just as well through Mr. ——?"

"No, not what I have to say. I do not come to you

entirely on matters of business, and therefore I must speak to you myself."

"If you do not come on matters of business, I do not see what you can have to say to me."

"Miss Lingard," he dropped his florid manner, and spoke with an earnestness which impressed her in spite of herself, "you are hard upon me, as the English say. I have not intentionally done you any wrong. It is no fault of mine that I am your uncle's son."

"I know that," said Christine. "I do not oppose your claim. If you can justify it, you have a perfect right to everything that Colonel Lingard left behind."

"I can justify it. I have already satisfied every one who has looked into the matter. It will take me some time, for the necessary formalities to be concluded, but in the meantime I can assure you that there is not the least doubt."

Christine bowed slightly. "When these formalities are concluded," she said, quietly, "we shall then know what to believe."

"But you will not believe me on my word, on my honor? Yet you are my own cousin, my own flesh and blood. It is hard measure that I have dealt out to me: my father kept me at a distance, my only relations will not acknowledge me. Is that right? Is that just? What harm have I done?"

There was so much justice in these representations that Christine sat abashed. But after a moment's thought, she recovered herself and said with steady coldness,

"I do not wish to be unjust. You must excuse it if I seem slow to believe that you are my cousin. But to our English ideas, it is very strange that my uncle should not have recognized you as his son: stranger still that he should have let you live in his house as a dependent, and that you should have accepted that position. If you knew all along that you were Colonel Lingard's son, why did you not insist on his telling the truth about you?"

The young man spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders with the foreign air which was—in him—so odious to Christine's mind. In his manner there was a mixture of the insolent and the obsequious which she could not reconcile with her views as to the behavior and appearance of a member of the Lingard family. She had always prided herself on her freedom of prejudice: she had thought herself anything but insular; and yet it seemed utterly abhorrent to her that this olive-complexioned youth, with his un-English gestures, his foreign intonations, his long-continued habits of secrecy and subterfuge, should be her cousin, the son of her father's brother. She hated the very idea of his relationship to her.

Her reason told her that this feeling was absurd; and yet she rejoined, in answer to her reason, that so strong an aversion partakes of the nature of an instinct; and should not be lightly disregarded.

"Mademoiselle," said Florian, deprecatingly, "what could I do? A man must live. My father offered me employment in his house: it was not possible for me to refuse him."

It would have been possible for an Englishman to refuse a proposal so inconsistent with truth and dignity, reflected Christine; but she did not put her reflection into words.

"It is useless to discuss the past," she said, coldly. "May I ask, sir, what is the object of your present visit?"

"I came, my cousin—may I not call you so, mademoiselle?—to ask humbly whether I might hope for some sort of friendliness, of cordiality, between us. Not perhaps at present, while you are still in doubt as to the genuineness of my cause; but when that is proved, may I not ask then that you will recognize me as your kinsman?"

"When it is proved that you are my kinsman," said Christine, "I shall be the first to acknowledge the justice of your claim."

"And then—then—you will accept from me something of what you have lost? That is the proposition which I wish you to consider. Would it not be better if you and your side withdrew your opposition to my claim—an opposition which I understand that you mean to make—and accepted a certain sum, say a third part of the estate, as a compromise?"

"You cannot be very certain of your proofs if you make such a proposal," said Christine, warmly. "But it is not at all in my power to accept or decline it: I could do nothing without consultation with my family in England. It is not for me to make you any answer at all."

"But you could speak for me if you would."

"That I should never do."

"Why? You do not think the terms high enough? You thought of a half, perhaps?—you must remember that I am not obliged to offer you any compensation at all. But I am willing to do so, quite willing, if you, mademoiselle, will be on my side."

"Make your proposal through the lawyers, if you like," said Christine, rising, and taking a few paces towards the door as if to end the interview, "but I cannot promise to accept it. I shall go by the advice of my friends."

"But if they advise you to accept it——"

Christine threw back her proud head with a gesture of unmistakable offence.

"Mr. Florian," she said, deliberately, "if I have a voice in the matter, I shall say that I would rather die than accept a penny-piece from you, and I am fully convinced that my mother and sisters will say the same thing. We do not want your charity, and we never expected to inherit my uncle's fortune."

If she had expected to make Florian angry, she was mistaken. The young man became only more pathetically pleading than before.

"Miss Lingard," he said, "you mistake my motives altogether—I am certain that you do. I only wish for your comfort, your happiness."

"It is quite unnecessary that you should concern yourself about it," said Christine.

"Forgive me, no ; not if you are my cousin. For whom should I care but my relations? If there is any way in which you can be induced to accept——"

"There is no way," said Christine, haughtily. "I am much obliged to you for your good intentions, but it is perfectly impossible for me to think of taking anything as a gift from you. Whether you are my uncle's son or not, I do not know, but you are at any rate a stranger."

"But I may not always be a stranger. I may make myself better known to you in time. Miss Lingard—my cousin—let me lay not a poor third but the whole of my fortune at your feet. If you will be my wife——"

"Pray do not go on, Mr. Florian," said Christine.

"But I must—I will go on—if you will but consent to give your hand to me, then all these differences will be averted. I should then have the right——"

"Say no more, if you please. Your suggestions are quite impossible to carry out. I will not listen to another word on the subject."

Christine's face had grown pale, not red, with displeasure, and she carried her head as high as ever ; nevertheless it was easy to see that she was agitated and troubled. Taking advantage of her agitation, Florian ventured to try to detain her by laying one hand upon her arm.

"Permit me to speak," he said, earnestly, "permit me to say one word——"

But he had effectually angered her now. She drew her arm away from him with a look of the haughtiest contempt, and walked straight out of the room without a single word.

Florian Lingard, thus left alone, stamped his foot and

swore at her beneath his breath. He had thought that his schemes were exceedingly well devised, and behold! they were worse than useless. He knew that Christine would now use the whole of her influence against his claims, and he cursed her pride and her unassailable dignity in his heart. When he quitted the house he felt that he had failed in what he had meant to be a master stroke.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SISTERS.

"I NEVER knew anything so tiresome. He says he is too ill to be left, and that I must stay at home and read to him. It is too bad—I believe he does it on purpose," said Mrs. Vibert, with tears in her beautiful eyes.

She, her husband, and her sister, had taken up their abode for the present at the *Beau Sejour*, one of the two hotels that Mahatta contained. It was somewhat bare and comfortless to English eyes, but it possessed a lovely garden, remarkable for its roses, and it was on a bench, overshadowed by a big rosebush, which shed a shower of crimson petals over her shoulders now and then, that Evelyn Vibert sat and made her moan to her sister Daisy one sunny evening soon after their return from Naples.

The sisters were, as usual, smartly dressed, but in morning costume, although the dinner hour was approaching. They had made a plan to go with some young officers of the regiment then quartered at Scanderia for a moonlight picnic after dinner, and it was Mr. Vibert's unexpected indisposition that now put obstacles in the way. Mrs. Vibert, much annoyed by his refusal to be left alone, sat

sulkily on the garden bench, and traced a pattern on the gravel with her pretty pointed toes. Daisy stood before her, with her hands on her hips, in one of the free-and-easy attitudes which she especially affected.

"Is he very bad?" she asked, presently.

"Oh, he says so. He's got a pain or something," said Mrs. Vibert, resentfully, "and he says he might die if he were left alone. I never heard such nonsense. Dr. Morton said that there was no danger. It's only neuralgia."

"Well," said Daisy, "he's been very good on the whole, to us; I suppose he has some sort of a right to expect a return. It was a bargain, wasn't it?"

Evelyn turned on her sister in a sort of a rage. "A bargain, indeed! As if he hadn't got much the better of it! As if any girl like *me*—as good-looking as I am—would have ever *looked* at him if he hadn't been rich! I never bargained to be made a slave to his whims. It's easy for you to talk; you have not got to put up with what I have."

Daisy bore this attack calmly. "I didn't know you cared so much about going to-night," she said.

"I don't care! A stupid little donkey-riding picnic! It isn't *that*: it's the thought of having to obey that man—to be at his beck and call day and night! You don't know what it is—sometimes I think I hate him."

"Then you are very silly as well as wicked," said Daisy, warmly. She had her own ideas of right and wrong, although they were somewhat crude; and in spite of her "fastness," she honestly meant to keep herself and her sister within certain lines. "Percy isn't half bad: he is awfully open-handed, and just loads you with everything you want; I call it very mean to take his presents and speak of him as you do behind his back."

"I don't talk about him to anybody but you," said Mrs. Vibert, slowly.

"Oh, don't you!" exclaimed Daisy, significantly. "I thought you'd been making a good many confidences to Major Simpson the other day. I wouldn't if I were you, Evie. It doesn't pay in the long run. But about to-night, are you going to stay at home, then?"

"I suppose so. He is quite capable of coming down to dinner and telling every one what a bad wife I am if I say I will go."

"I don't know," said Daisy, hesitatingly. "If—if Captain Greville weren't coming, I think I would almost as soon stop at home. Then you could go. Percy doesn't mind my sitting with him when he is ill. I think I will stay."

She was capable of more unselfishness than most of her acquaintances knew. This was a really unselfish proposition, as Evelyn was aware, although she chose not to recognize it as such.

"All very fine," she said, with a sneer. "You would like to pose as a saint in Captain Greville's eyes, wouldn't you? I suppose it hasn't occurred to you that you *can't* go without me as chaperon?"

"Indeed I can. Who cares about a chaperon?" said Daisy, angrily. "And Mrs. Garrod is going: she would chaperon me, anyway, if you are so particular. And as you prefer to stay with Percy, I won't prevent you."

She walked away with her little chin in the air: and Evelyn, frowning and pouting still, turned to the nearest rose-tree and plucked two or three crimson roses which she fastened into the bosom of her smart gown. Presently she smoothed her brows, and tried to summon up a smile: she had heard the sound of footsteps and voices, and knew that some of the evening's visitors were approaching. The riding party was to be a fairly large one, and several of its members were to dine that night at the hotel, independently, however, and not as Mrs. Vibert's guests. Before

long, one or two young men approached her, and she saw that Daisy was at the other end of the garden with some of the others. In Daisy's absence, it was easier for her to say, with a gentle assumption of wifely devotion, that she had resolved to give up the moonlight ride in order to pass the evening with her husband who was ill. There was a general outcry and many words of regret, but, rather to Mrs. Vibert's disgust, nobody seriously tried to dissuade her from staying at home: in fact, the young men, boyish and thoughtless as they were, approved at heart of her decision, and thought that it was "nice" of her to stay with her husband, and that they, when they were married, would like their wives to do the same. Evelyn Vibert would probably have been hard to convince of the stride she had made in their estimations by her resolution to stay at home.

For, although they flirted with Mrs. Vibert and her sister, and brought them bon-bons and flowers and other little presents which they could sometimes ill afford, they were good-hearted, honorable, tender-hearted lads, with affectionate remembrances of the homes that they had left, and the mothers and sisters who formed their ideas of womanly excellence. Evelyn and Daisy were mistaken when they thought that their interest in the pastimes of these young men, in their bets, their races, their cigarette smoking and their whisky drinking, really excited men's admiration: the young fellows laughed and enjoyed themselves, but they would have been better pleased if the sisters had sometimes shown that they were true women instead of mere feeble copies of fast young men.

So Mrs. Vibert won herself an unmerited amount of popularity that evening, and it was perhaps owing to that fact that one of the young officers begged, rather diffidently, that he might be allowed to introduce a friend, who was also dining at the *Beau Sejour* that night.

"Any friend of yours, I am sure, Mr. Maitland," said Evelyn, with sweetness. "Is he here?"

"No, he has not come yet," said Mr. Maitland, who was a ruddy-faced, honest-eyed boy of twenty, only just joined; "and I wanted to tell you about him before he came. He's awfully anxious to be introduced to you, Mrs. Vibert. And he has so few friends here that it would be a real kindness——"

He had lowered his voice and come a little closer. Evelyn Vibert looked at him with amusement.

"Does he live here?" she said. "And doesn't he know any people? That's rather odd, isn't it?"

"I think he's a very good fellow," said Maitland, coloring a little. "Although people *have* said some rather nasty things about him. It's that son of old Colonel Lingard's, the one who has just got all the money, you know; and everybody is beginning to take him up."

"He has got it? He has really been proved the son of Colonel Lingard?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. And do you know, Mrs. Vibert," here the young man's voice became more confidential than ever, "he wants to let that lovely house of his, and I was thinking—I knew that you were looking out for a house, and if you met Mr. Florian Lingard, you might perhaps make some arrangement with him——"

"How awfully kind and thoughtful of you!" said Mrs. Vibert, letting her large eyes rest on the boy's round red face with her softest expression. "I am sure I should like to meet him very much. Mr. Florian Lingard, is that what he is called? What a pretty name!"

"Here he comes," said Maitland, in a low tone; and Evelyn's eyes turned, not absolutely for the first time, but for the first time with observation, to the slender figure and olive face, with the dark eyes and jetty mustache, which belonged to the man once known as Paul Florian, Col-

Colonel Lingard's secretary, now everywhere spoken of as Paul Florian Lingard, the late Colonel Lingard's son. With his accession of wealth and dignity, the young man's manner had improved. He was no longer quite so deferential, so oily in speech and smooth of tongue, as he used to be. His eyes were shifty and watchful still, but he had ceased to sneer, except when he was in a very bad temper ; and this in itself was an improvement. To Mrs. Vibert, whose taste was none of the best, he seemed a very handsome and attractive man ; and the prospect of securing his house for the winter made her especially anxious to be attentive to him. She therefore received him very graciously, expressed her pleasure on hearing that he had been asked to join the riding party that night, and so contrived matters that he sat next her at the dinner table, although by right he ought to have been much lower down.

Florian had achieved his end. He had so far convinced the lawyers, as well as Colonel Lingard's friends, that he was the dead man's son and heir, that he had no difficulty in obtaining plenty of money, although the fortune was not legally his own as yet. No will of Colonel Lingard's had been found, and Florian Lingard, as he now signed himself, was therefore entitled ultimately to take possession of everything, including the house and its valuable furniture. To this house, however, Florian betrayed a decided dislike. He openly avowed that he meant to let or sell it as soon as it was actually in his hands, and would then either go to Cairo and up the Nile or leave Egypt altogether.

Mrs. Vibert had not sounded the depths of the animosity that existed between Florian and Captain Greville, or she might perhaps have hesitated a little before receiving the ex-secretary so amiably : but she was somewhat dense in regard to all matters in which she was not personally con-

cerned ; and, moreover, Captain Greville had avoided the subject of Colonel Lingard's affairs in his conversation with her. So it was just as well that Gilbert was not dining at the *Beau Sejour* that night, for he would have been very much disgusted at finding himself in Florian Lingard's company.

Daisy did not enjoy her dinner quite so much as usual, although her eyes were bright and her laugh ready. She was disappointed that Captain Greville was not dining there, and rather afraid that Evelyn meant to take her at her word and leave her at home with Mr. Vibert. Then, being at bottom a shrewd little person, she was puzzled by something unusual in her sister's behavior that night. There was nothing extraordinary in the extreme attention she gave to Mr. Florian Lingard's lightest look and word : she always bestowed an exclusive devotion, for the moment, on the man whom she wanted to attract, but there was a flush on her cheek, a light in her eye, which Daisy could not understand.

"What's she up to now?" said Miss Touchwood to herself, in her usual elegant English. "I suppose she wants to coax him into letting us have that house cheap ; but she's putting it on rather strong, isn't she? She's angry with Percy ; but as he isn't here to see her, what's the good of it?"

She was hardly prepared for the eagerness with which Evelyn approached her after dinner and drew her aside.

"Look here, Daisy ; I did not mean to be cross, you know."

"Well, you *were* cross," said Daisy, practically.

"Yes, but never mind now. I'm just going up to Percy's room to see how he is. If he doesn't object, will you stick to what you said just now?"

She had put her arm through Daisy's, and was strolling

with her round the garden : the men were lingering in the hall or on the veranda steps.

"What do you mean?" said Daisy.

"You said you wouldn't mind staying with Percy. I want awfully to go for this ride to-night; and you might stay at home for once."

"I don't see it, I am sure," said Daisy, the color rising in her cheeks. "It's your husband, not mine; and you promised to look after him, I didn't! Besides, I said to Captain Greville that I should go."

"Captain Greville's not coming: somebody told me so," said Evelyn, quickly. "You won't miss much—and we can't both go."

"Why do you want to go so much, Evie?"

"Never mind; I have a reason. The house, of course. I believe I can get Mr. Lingard to let me have it, if I manage him a little. Come, Daisy, don't be so selfish."

"I'm not selfish; but I think *you* are—beastly selfish," said Daisy, almost passionately. "However, I'll stay with Percy, if you like. If Captain Greville isn't going, I don't much care."

Evelyn hesitated a moment, as if uncertain whether to say anything more; for, as a matter of fact, she had invented the statement that Captain Greville meant to stay away, on the spur of the moment. On second thoughts she did not confess the truth, but contented herself with kissing and thanking her sister effusively. Even the wonder expressed in the honest faces of her young soldier friends did not deter her from the expedition.

Daisy shed an angry tear or two when her sister had gone, and then went slowly up to Mr. Vibert's private sitting-room, where she found the invalid very hard to please, and quite impossible to amuse. She was glad when at half-past ten he set her free; and she ran down stairs to the veranda, hoping to get a little fresh air before

she went to bed. The riding party would probably not be back until two in the morning, and she did not mean to sit up for Evelyn's return.

The balcony, with its marble-topped tables and wicker chairs, looked bare and almost desolate in the moonlight ; Daisy moved forward more timidly than usual, and was startled when a tall dark figure rose from a chair in the remotest corner.

"Is that you, Miss Touchwood?"

"Yes, Captain Greville, it's me. What are you doing here?"

"Waiting to see you," said Gilbert Greville, with a rather awkward little laugh.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

"Yes, she *is* pretty," thought Greville, as the girl came forward, the moonlight shining on her golden hair, her white skin, her pale blue draperies and her bluer eyes. "It's a pity she's not been brought up differently." Aloud, he added, "I was *hoping* to see you ; perhaps I should put it in that way."

"Why didn't you ask for me, then?" said Daisy, smiling at him with ready pleasure.

"Well, I did not quite like to send up for you, especially when I knew that you were kindly looking after your brother-in-law. But I turned in and sat down here, thinking that you might possibly run down for a look at the moonlight before you went to bed. And I was right, it seems."

"Quite right. Won't you have a drink?" asked Daisy,

hospitably. "And I'll have a cigarette, if you don't mind ; I've been pining for one all the evening."

It was on the tip of Greville's tongue to say, "No, don't !" But he refrained, knowing that it would be useless : and he looked on with rather a constrained smile, while Daisy produced her own silver cigarette-case and match-box and proceeded, with all the aplomb in the world, to "light up."

"This is awfully nice, isn't it?" she said, poising herself on one of the tables and swinging her pretty, slender feet in the air; it was a favorite attitude of hers. "I like the moonlight, don't you? Why didn't you go to the picnic?"

"I have been to the picnic."

"Been to it? But Evelyn said you weren't going."

"Mrs. Vibert said so?"

"Swore it. That was how she put me off going," said Daisy, candidly. "I wanted to go till she said she had heard you had given it up, and then I was so disgusted that I said I would stay with Percy."

Captain Greville smiled rather cynically. "Mrs. Vibert must have been very anxious to go," he said ; but it is to be feared that the satirical intention of his words was lost upon Miss Touchwood.

"Yes," she said, "I think she *was* rather set upon it. But do tell me, Captain Greville, did you really go to-night?"

"I did indeed, I always meant to go."

"And then you came back? What for, I wonder?"

There was a conscious little smile on Daisy's face, a readiness to blush and dimple at the expected answer, which some men would have found irresistible. But Captain Greville looked at her with curious gravity, with curious apathy, some people would have said, and paused for a minute or two before he answered her at all. "I

turned back," he said at last, "because I found one man there whom I dislike so much that I felt inclined to refuse to be seen in his company. That's rather strong, is it not? But the fact is that I was so much attached to Colonel Lingard that I do not care to associate with this new bearer of his name. I turned back in a moment of pique and anger, I acknowledge; but I am not sorry, as it gives me the opportunity of telling you, Miss Touchwood, what perhaps you don't know"—he spoke now with a smile—"that Mr. Florian Lingard, lately known as Florian, is about the most unpopular man in Mahatta."

"I never spoke to him before to-night," said Daisy in self-defence. "Mr. Maitland introduced him to my sister. I don't like him very much, though he is handsome, is he not?"

"Handsome!" The word was spoken with such bitter contempt that Daisy was half frightened and half amused. "If you knew him as I do——"

"I shouldn't call him handsome? Oh! handsome is as handsome does," said Daisy, laughing. "But I thought it wasn't good form for one man to blacken another man's character behind his back, Captain Greville."

Gilbert stiffened immediately. "Mr. Florian knows precisely what I think of him," he said. "I think everybody in the place knows, except perhaps yourself and Mrs. Vibert."

"How has he offended you?"

"I have no cause of personal offence against him," said Greville, dryly. "I disapprove of the way in which I have seen him behave to my late friend, Colonel Lingard, and I consider that he is now behaving very badly to Colonel Lingard's niece."

"His cousin, Miss Lingard?" said Daisy, in rather a pointed tone. "Oh, well, I have heard the other side of that story, Captain Greville. Miss Lingard is quite well

off, and only came out for a winter's visit to her uncle. Colonel Lingard had never seen her in his life, and why he was bound to leave her all his money when he had a son of his own, I'm sure I don't know. Yet that is what some people seem to think."

She stopped with a little pout and looked at him. There was an ominous darkening of his brows which warned her not to go too far.

"I am not able to discuss Miss Lingard's affairs with any one," said he, coldly. "I am not so well informed about them as you appear to be." He could not forbear that little jibe. "I only say that I disapprove of the line that Mr. Florian has taken, and that I dislike the man personally."

"Now suppose I were to tell him," said Daisy, with the childish insolence which in her was partly affected and partly real, "what would you say then, Captain Greville!"

"I should be quite prepared to uphold and defend every word that I have said to you," replied Greville, with a certain grimness of determination that rather alarmed his listener.

"You need not be afraid: I can keep my own counsel—and yours too," she said, trying not to show that she was daunted. "But indeed we are not so very friendly with Mr. Lingard as you seem to think. He was introduced to us only to-night, and perhaps we shall not meet him again."

"Perhaps not," said Gilbert, gravely. "I hope not." But as he spoke a vision floated before his mind's eye which told him that his hope was not likely to be realized. He had seen Mrs. Vibert and Florian Lingard riding together in the moonlight; and something in the pose of the woman's figure, or the turn of her head, something in the man's eager black eyes and slightly smiling mouth, had

told him that the two had already started on the perilous primrose way of a flirtation which neither would readily relinquish. He was sorry; for though he had no great respect for Evelyn Vibert and her sister, he had a liking for both, a queer, half-ashamed liking, such as a man is conscious of sometimes for things of which his reason does not approve; and he did not like to think that they should be left without warning to the mercies of a man like Florian Lingard, whom he cordially distrusted and despised. But he was not prepared for the tone of Daisy's next remark.

"Do you mind?" she said, almost wistfully.

"Mind? Well—I have told you. I don't think he is a good sort of man for you to know."

"I did not think you cared whom we knew," said Daisy, softly.

"Oh yes, I care. Why should you think so?" Captain Greville asked vaguely. He felt rather flattered by the value which she evidently attached to his opinion. And it was not unpleasant to sit beside her there in the moonlight, and to guide her with his counsel in the way she should go. After a moment's silence, he took up his speech again. But his voice had grown as low and gentle as Daisy's own.

"You see, we men understand these things better than you do. We see what a man really is; and when we find that a friend of ours, a girl perhaps, that we—like," the pause seemed very significant to Daisy, "we would give our right hand to warn her against him. We are not always able, but in this case, I have reason for not being friendly with that man, and for knowing that he is a cur."

"I won't be friends with him—I promise you," said Daisy, earnestly. "And I'll tell Evie."

"Perhaps you had better not tell her all I have said," Captain Greville suggested, with some hesitation. "She

might refuse to listen and insist on greater friendliness than ever. You see I understand the perversity of women."

"I am sure we are not all perverse," said Daisy. "But I see what you mean. I will just do what I can, without saying why. You mayn't believe it, but Evie is awfully much guided by what I say about people. I will tell her I don't like Mr. Lingard, and very likely she will come round to my view."

Greville thought to himself that, after all, she was a sensible little girl.

"I think you will be very wise," he said aloud. "Believe me, Miss Touchwood, I don't speak from caprice or ill-humor. I have good reason to dislike the man."

Daisy wanted very much to ask what his reason was, but her mind was fuller of her own personal concerns than of Mr. Florian Lingard, so she put aside the question for some future occasion, and went off on her own tack.

"I often wish we had somebody to tell us what to do, and what not to do. I know we often make mistakes," she said—an avowal which would greatly have surprised her admirers could they have heard it. "Evie and I, we've just brought ourselves up, you know, and never had anybody to take care of us and look after us as most girls have. I sometimes wish things were different."

"A woman's instinct will tell her what is right and what is wrong," said Greville, somewhat dogmatically.

"Oh, will it? Well, I'm not so sure of that," Daisy answered, at once defiant and uneasy under his generalizations. "Whenever I go by *my* instincts, I find that I'm offending somebody. If I had a friend to tell me always—like you have done, Captain Greville——"

"That would be a great responsibility," said Greville, laughing, but uncomfortable. "I am very happy to be of

service to you when I can, Miss Touchwood, but I'm afraid I cannot undertake the office of Mentor."

"Mentor? I don't know what you mean," said Daisy, who was, it must be confessed, woefully ignorant of most things taught in girls' school-rooms, and who had probably never heard of Telemachus. "I meant—just as an elder brother might do, you know. I never had a brother; but it must be awfully nice——"

"And you think I should do as well as a brother? I feel very much honored. A sister like yourself is a possession any man might be proud of," said Greville, dropping into the tone of mingled banter and gallantry to which she was accustomed. "Such a sister!"

"And such a brother!" she answered, with laughter that was perhaps a little forced. "How fortunate we are!"

Greville felt that he had gone far enough. The moonlight and the scent of the flowers seemed to be rising to his brain. He had a mischievous desire to ask his pretty companion whether brothers did not kiss their sisters now and then, and he did not suppose that the question would mortally offend Miss Daisy. That he restrained the impulse, was not from fear of her wrath, but from a sense of the honor due to womanhood in general—possibly also to one woman in particular. He thought of the woman whose friendship he had asked for not so very long ago, and he drew back from Daisy Touchwood's proffered regard.

"I must be going," he said with a sudden change of tone. "It is very late, I'm afraid. Good-night, Miss Touchwood."

"That sounds very formal, from a brother to a sister," said Daisy regarding him with one of her most bewitching smiles.

He had stood up, and now looked down at her from

his superior height, with a look of benignant amusement. The spell was broken by that momentary remembrance of a nobler type of womanhood: the man who had truly loved, or thought of loving, a woman like Christine Lingard, could not flirt with the prettiest Daisy Touchwood in the world.

"Very formal, doesn't it?" he said, easily. "But friendship is quite consistent with great formality, I assure you. Good-night."

He bowed over her hand with more deference than usual, lifted his hat and turned away. He was going to catch the last train into town, and the whistle of the engine driver told him that it was already near.

Daisy watched him out of sight, and then actually stamped her little foot with vexation. The tears filled her big blue eyes, and she bit her lips to keep herself from a burst of tears.

"He doesn't care one bit!" she said to herself. "But I'll make him—I'll make him care! I wonder what made him turn off like that: it was just as if he had remembered something. I hope he has not met anybody he likes better: he has not been half so nice to us since that Miss Lingard came here. I'll sit up for Evie and just give it to her for telling me such a story about him."

But she soon became very sleepy, and ended by going to her room and lying down on the bed in her dressing-gown—a course of procedure which of course ended speedily in profound slumber. It must have been two or three o'clock when she was aroused by the presence of her sister in the room. Mrs. Vibert, still in her hat, stood at the bedside with a candle in her hand.

"Why, child, you'll be eaten up with mosquitoes. Why are you not undressed?"

"I waited for you," said Daisy, starting up on her elbow and blinking at the candle. "I wanted to tell you

that I'm very angry with you. You said Captain Greville was not going to the picnic and he was : it was horrid of you tell me such a story."

"Well, if I hadn't, you would not have let me go instead of you," said Mrs. Vibert, with a shrill, affected little laugh ; "and 'the end justifies the means.' "

"Why did you want to go so much ? It did not matter to you, and it did to me."

"It mattered to me and to you too. I have got what we were both wanting, so you need not be angry with me for my little stratagem."

"Stratagem indeed ! " exclaimed Daisy, angrily. "But what do you mean ?"

Evelyn lifted the candle and surveyed herself for a minute or two in her sister's looking-glass before answering.

"I mean," she said at last, with an abstracted smile, "that I have persuaded Mr. Lingard to let us have his house on absurdly low terms, and that we shall therefore probably stay in Mahatta nearly all the winter."

And Daisy's anger was appeased.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECRETARY AND COMPANION.

To Greville's infinite disgust, the Viberts were installed in Colonel Lingard's old house before many days had elapsed. There seemed no doubt as to Florian Lingard's right to dispose of the colonel's property as he chose : the papers and certificates which he produced were sufficient to prove his identity and his heirship ; and the colonel's relatives in England telegraphed out that no ob-

stacle need be thrown in his way. So, after the first delays, caused chiefly by indecision and surprise, Florian Lingard stepped into the colonel's shoes, and took his place in Mahatta society as an eligible man of good position and independent fortune.

He had announced his intention of leaving Egypt as soon as possible, but to every one's surprise, he lingered. He had let his house and was forced to take refuge at the hotel which the Lingards had quitted, where the bare walls and stone floors contrasted very unfavorably with the luxurious surroundings of the late colonel. But he did not complain: he only smiled when remarks on the subject were made to him, and there was something in that smile which very few people understood.

Daisy failed ignominiously when she tried to explain to her sister that Mr. Florian Lingard was not a man that they ought to know. Evelyn's cheeks began to flame, her eyebrows to contract, her pretty lips to pout, before half a dozen words had been spoken.

"Really, I should like to know what business Captain Greville has to dictate to us in that way," she broke forth.

"I never said it was Captain Greville," said Daisy.

"As if I could not tell. All your ideas come from Captain Greville; there's nobody like him in all the world, is there?"

"I should like to know where you would find a better man to take your ideas from," said Daisy, furiously. "He's a gentleman, not a cad, like your Mr. Lingard."

"My Mr. Lingard?" said Mrs. Vibert, with a curious little smile. "He is not my property—any more than Gilbert Greville is yours, my dear."

The sisters often indulged in a little verbal sword-play of this description; but it meant little: they were good friends at heart. Only the word "heart" seemed out of

keeping with Evelyn Vibert's demeanor : she had plenty of vanity, plenty of desire to be admired, but very little affection, even for her sister. Wherein Daisy differed from her, for Daisy, in spite of her faults, had a heart with which to love and hate.

"Evelyn," she said on this occasion, with a stamp of her tiny foot, "Evelyn, you are hateful—simply detestable!"

"Don't be a fool," said Mrs. Vibert, contemptuously. "Don't I see the truth—that you would sooner marry Captain Greville than any man in the world?"

To Mrs. Vibert's surprise, Daisy's fair face suddenly turned scarlet, and the tears rose to her eyes.

"I don't see why you need put it in that way," she said, half defiantly, half sullenly.

"I don't see how else I can put it," returned the elder sister.

"He's very nice, of course," said Daisy in rather a daunted tone; "but he's not the only man who——"

Evelyn threw away a book which she had been holding, with such force that it fell on the floor quite at the other side of the room. "Don't talk such utter rot," she said, sharply. "As if one could not see with half an eye that you were devoted to him! Do speak the truth like a sensible girl—If Captain Greville were to ask you to marry him, would you say Yes or No? Honor bright?"

"Well, if he were to ask me—I don't know but what I should say Yes," said Daisy, with her usual directness of manner. "But I'd rather wait until he asked me, before I made up my mind about it."

"But he is very likely to ask you, is he not?"

The tears that rose to the girl's eyes were tears of vexation this time. "That's just it," she said, almost passionately, "I'm never sure. Sometimes he is awfully nice to me; and then again, he isn't. It seems to hang

on a hair, and that's why I think it's so horrid of you not to do what he wants about Mr. Lingard. If you offend him now, he will turn against me very likely. And what can I do?"

A curiously hard expression came into Evelyn's face.

"I don't see that he has anything to do with *my* acquaintances. You can do as he tells you, as much as you like; but I shall not give up any of my friends for him."

"Do you call Mr. Lingard a friend? You have known him one week only!"

"A week is quite long enough. I like Mr. Lingard, and don't intend to give him up. Think how useful he has been to us about this house."

"And because he has been useful, I am to quarrel with Captain Greville?"

"Nonsense, my dear. Make the best of your friends, while I make the best of mine. We need not ask both of them to dinner on the same day, you know."

"You will never be able to help it," said Daisy petulantly. "You will ask Mr. Lingard yourself, and then Gervase will meet Captain Greville and invite *him*. Gervase likes Captain Greville, you know: it is one point in his favor."

"There is not much beside to be said for him, is there?" said Evelyn, with a chilly laugh.

"More than you seem to think. Why, Evelyn, it seems to me sometimes as if you positively hated your husband."

"So it does to me, sometimes," said Mrs. Vibert.

Daisy said nothing, but walked across the room to the spot where the book which Evelyn had thrown down was lying, picked it up and straightened out the leaves. It was not her way to remonstrate with her sister, but the action was something of a remonstrance in itself. So also was her next speech—in significance if not in form.

"Gervase does not like his books thrown about in this way."

"Since you are so fond of Gervase," said Evelyn, throwing herself irritably from one side of the divan to the other, "I will tell you of a plan of mine which will be for dear Gervase's pleasure and benefit."

"All right: go on."

Daisy did not turn round to listen. She was standing now beside an open window, looking out at the distant view of the blue Mediterranean with its white sails. The weather was growing too chilly for afternoon tea on the veranda, and it had therefore been made ready in the drawing-room, but an unusual fact, and one which perhaps accounted for Evelyn's bad temper, had occurred—not a single male visitor had presented himself, and the one female caller had proved herself an unmitigated bore. Evelyn had at last given up the hope of any more interesting visitors, and had thrown herself down on a couch, where her smart dress of blue and gold made a bright spot of color among the dim-hued Eastern draperies. From this point of vantage she thus delivered herself.

"You seem to think that because I am not passionately in love with Gervase that I am therefore devoid of all feeling for him. It is not so at all. I am thinking only of his advantage in what I wish to propose, and I do trust that you won't set yourself against it in a disagreeable, unsympathetic manner."

"I should like to hear what it is," said Daisy.

"Well, I am going to tell you. You know how tiresome it has been sometimes when we both wanted to go out, and Gervase wasn't well enough to go with us, or well enough to be left? I have already been suggesting to him what a good thing it would be if he could get somebody to come and read to him—be a sort of companion and secretary to him, you know——"

"Just as Mr. Florian Lingard used to be to old Colonel Lingard," suggested Daisy, thoughtfully.

"You spiteful little thing! Of course I might have known that you would say something thoroughly nasty, like that. I don't mean any such points of likeness to be discerned, however. Gervase's secretary is to be a woman." There was a touch of triumph in her tone.

"Then you have arranged it all entirely."

"Almost entirely. Gervase is charmed by the idea. He will have time for a nice little flirtation with his secretary: it will keep his mind employed," said Evelyn, with the callous insolence of manner which she could assume at will. "He will not have so much leisure to bestow on me, thank goodness."

"Evelyn, I think you are very horrid."

"Think so, my dear, if you like: my best piece of news is yet to come. The secretary has been seen, selected—all but engaged."

"Who on earth——" began Daisy, turning round with a startled face.

"Ah yes, I should think so: you can ask questions when you choose. The secretary—*reader*, I think she prefers to call herself—is our dear friend of the steam-ship *Cyrus*, Miss Lingard."

Daisy gave a little scream of laughter, and clapped her hands together: for the moment the whole situation appeared intensely comic to her. "Oh, what fun! how ridiculous!" she cried. Then she clapped her hands and became thoughtful. "But—will it be fun? I don't quite know. I think it may be very stupid."

"I thought you hated Miss Lingard."

"So I did: so I do: especially," said Daisy naïvely, "when I know she is such a friend of Captain Greville's. I'm not at all sure that he will like it very much."

"Nonsense! you can represent the matter to him in the

most charming way possible. Make it out to be your own idea if you like."

" Evelyn ! "

" Well, my dear, I have known you tell a fib as well as anybody else, in your day. What makes you so scrupulous, all of a sudden ? Captain Greville ? "

" I don't tell fibs," said Daisy, coloring angrily ; " I leave that sort of thing to you. All I mean is—won't it be awkward to have her here constantly—dining with us—sitting about with us when people are here, and so on ? "

" You goose ! As if I meant that sort of thing. She is not going to be *our* companion : she is going to be Gervase's. She will sit in his library, or his room, or his corner of the garden—wherever he chooses to be : and so far from our being plagued with her, we are really preventing her from getting into society at all. Don't you see ? "

" But Gervase won't always want her."

" No, but the arrangement is that she is always to be at hand during the daytime in case he does want her. She will go away in the evenings unfortunately—we can't prevent that——"

" But where will she go ? To the hotel ? "

" No, to Mrs. Ferguson's. Mrs. Ferguson has taken her up, and is agog concerning her. We shall have a tremendous amount of credit for having thought of such a charming employment for her, and we shall get her out of your way at the same time."

Daisy looked rather guilty, but kept silence. Mrs. Vibert yawned and stretched herself, and was also silent for a time. Presently she said, in rather an aggrieved voice,

" I think you might thank me for doing you a good turn."

For answer, Daisy leaned over her sister's couch, and

kissed her on the brow. Then she stood thoughtful and pensive, her baby face contracted, her arms akimbo, her foot tracing patterns on the ground. "I don't in the least know what to say," she broke out at last. "She was awfully disagreeable to us on board ship: she showed us quite plainly what she thought of us—and I suppose she'll try to keep up that grand sort of manner whenever she sees us. But she won't be able to! She won't! If I thought she would, I couldn't bear to have her in the house."

"Of course she can't keep up that uncivil manner when she is our paid dependent," said Evelyn, dryly. "Gervase would soon pull her up if she tried it on him."

"And that is worst of all!" cried Daisy, almost with tears in her voice. "It makes me feel so nasty, so mean, so small! No, I don't thank you for what you have done, Evie. I'm sorry, awfully sorry."

"Really, Daisy, I did think you had a little common sense," said Mrs. Vibert, languidly getting off the sofa, and facing her sister for a moment before she left the room. "You always said you hated that girl, and wanted to take her down if you could; and now that you have the chance you won't take it."

"I will take it: I know I shall take it; but I hate myself for doing so?" cried Daisy, vehemently.

And Evelyn raised her eyebrows as she retired to dress for dinner, and considered within herself how it was that "the kid" was so little amenable to reason, in spite of the years which they had spent together in struggling for a position in the world.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONLY NEXT DOOR.

MRS. VIBERT'S communication to her sister had some truth in it; but matters were not quite so much advanced as she represented them to be. Mr. Vibert was indeed anxious to secure a secretary, and Christine had been asked to undertake the post, but as yet she had given no definite answer either way.

Mrs. Ferguson's advice pointed to her acceptance of the work.

"You know, dear," she said, in her affectionate way "I don't want you to do anything at all but stay comfortably here with me; but if you *will* do something for yourself, then I really think you won't find anything nicer. To read aloud or to write letters—why, that is much pleasanter work than drudging with a pack of children or being companion to some tiresome old lady."

"Yes, perhaps so. But the women of the family—I don't like them," said Christine, a faint touch of scorn curling her fine lip at the remembrance of Mrs. Vibert and her sister on board ship.

"I quite agree with you. They are thoroughly objectionable," said Mrs. Ferguson, with sudden fierceness. "The way they behave when young men are present—the flirtations they carry on—are simply disgusting. But what can one do? They go everywhere; everybody receives them; and the men won't hear a word against them. You see what it is to be pretty and smartly dressed: one may do anything one pleases then."

The implication was that Christine was neither pretty nor smartly dressed : and Christine was well aware of her friend's meaning ; but she only smiled and made no reply.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Ferguson did not think Christine very pretty, and always wondered what it was that made certain artistic people admire her so much. The pale and pensive character of her beauty did not appeal to Mrs. Ferguson's sense of what was admirable, and she decidedly disapproved of Christine's taste in dress. The girl's long, sweeping garments, her studious avoidance of bright colors and superfluous ornaments, rather repelled Mrs. Ferguson, whose own taste lay in the direction of the frivolous : she would have liked any girl staying in her house to wear short skirts and sailor hats and be ready for a frolic at any moment. Now Christine, out of respect to the memory of her uncle, was still wearing nothing but black or white, and even her pretty white dresses, beautifully made and finely embroidered as they were, were not fashionable enough to please her hostess. "They suit you, no doubt ; but I don't see anybody else wearing them," Mrs. Ferguson would say sometimes in puzzled tones ; and she would have been still more perplexed if any one had ventured to suggest to her that the highest art in dress is to wear exactly what does suit you, and not what happens to be the newest fashion of the moment. In her heart, the good lady admired Miss Touchwood and Mrs. Vibert far more than she admired Christine.

"Besides," Mrs. Ferguson usually concluded at the end of several discussions anent her guest's future, "if you go to the Viberts, I don't suppose you will see much of the ladies of the family. I fancy they want to keep that poor man well out of the way."

"And me too," said Christine, with an odd little smile.

"Oh, dear no," said Mrs. Ferguson, with the vague but cheerful optimism which formed a salient feature in her character, but which, too often, bore no relation at all to facts. "Oh dear no, why should they want to keep you out of their way? Your styles are so different—they would never clash at all."

"I should hope they were rather different," said Christine calmly, but, somehow, the tears had found a way to her eyes as she left the room. A wave of unreasoning anger passed across her. It was hard—very hard—she thought, that the only way of earning a little money which seemed open to her should be through serving the very people whom she disliked and despised. But letters from her mother and sisters had convinced her that she would be of more service to them by earning money for herself and leaving them free to go to Cannes for the winter than by returning to England; and she had resolved, therefore, that she would do all that lay in her power, even at the sacrifice of her dearest prejudices. And Christine was a girl in whom prejudice was strong, and she had the strongest of all prejudice against people like Mrs. Vibert and Miss Touchwood.

But her will was stronger than prejudice, and so it came to pass that in course of time she had an interview with Mr. Vibert, and was engaged by him to spend a few hours of each day at his house, as reader and amanuensis. She was relieved to find that she did not dislike her actual employer. In time, indeed, she came to have rather a feeling of pity for him; but at first she was simply thankful that he was not as entirely objectionable as his wife and sister-in-law.

Gervase Vibert was a rich man now, but he had not always been rich. He had begun life as the younger son of a younger son, with his way to make in the world; and thirty years of unrelenting toil had not served to provide

him with more than a modest competence. Fortunately at this juncture, an old relation died and left him a hundred and fifty thousand pounds or so, and on this fortune Gervase Vibert set about enjoying life. To begin with, he married one of the prettiest young women he could find : regardless of the fact that she was an almost penniless orphan, brought up in a random kind of way by relatives at Cape Town and in England—relatives who were shifty, impecunious, but ambitious people, ready to spend their last penny in pushing themselves into a better class of society than that to which they had been born. He was very generous to his bride and her sister : as Daisy had once reminded Evelyn, he had spent lavishly upon them both, and was most certainly entitled to a return. They had now been married for more than a year, and he had done his best from his own point of view to make her happy. He had given her a house in town and one in the country ; he had encouraged her to spend his money freely in the way she preferred,—dress and horse-racing were her most serious sources of expenditure,—and when she tired of England, which she did pretty soon, he brought her and her sister abroad with him to Italy and then to Egypt, where he meant to spend the winter.

It was not easy to content Evelyn : that was the worst of it. Even in Egypt, which she had long declared to be her “dream,” she was dissatisfied, as often out of humor, as unamiable, in fact, as she had been in London, during the season, when she could not get as many countesses as she wanted to call upon her.

Mr. Vibert’s experiment in marriage was hardly perhaps to be called a success. But he was less aware of this fact than were the on-lookers. He was sincerely proud of his beautiful wife : his eyes were not open to her faults, for though he occasionally grumbled at and scolded her vagaries, and was made unhappy by some of them, he did

not repine. His own increasing ill-health made him more submissive to her whims than he had been when they were first married. He felt apologetically that he could not give her all the amusement that she desired, and he often yielded therefore to her wishes at considerable inconvenience to himself, by way of a set-off to inevitable deprivations.

In person, he was lank, and pale, with a suffering expression, knitted brows, and a thin sour mouth, unshadowed by beard or mustache. He was a student by nature, and the long-denied instinct of scholarship was now for the first time having its way. Christine found it a pleasure to hear his dry, cynical comments on the books she read aloud to him; but she wondered more and more, as time went on, that a man who had apparently so much knowledge of the world should be so easily hoodwinked by a smile and a few sweet words from the lovely Evelyn. True, he had his snappish days when nothing seemed to please him; but his irritability was easily accounted for on the plea of suffering. Before many days had passed, Christine had settled down to her new work with a feeling almost of content; while Mr. Vibert, for his part, professed himself more than satisfied by her sympathy and attainments. She spent her time chiefly in Mr. Vibert's study, or in the garden with him, and was seldom, if ever, brought into contact with the women of the family. Neither did she see the visitors who came to the house, and this was a decided relief to her.

Captain Greville was away for a few days, just when she had to make her decision. His absence troubled her a little—for had she not almost promised to take no important step without asking his advice?—but finally she decided that it would be weak and foolish to wait any longer. Besides—why should she ask his advice? she said to herself proudly. He was nothing to her: scarcely

even a friend. She had seen very little of him for the last few days.

The reason she had not seen much of him for a week or so was that Captain Greville was still of two minds. He knew that he was very much attracted by Christine, and that he had never met a woman who seemed to him half so good or half so fair ; but then—he had not made up his mind to marry. He got a few days' leave and went to Cairo, so that he might think over the matter. And when he returned, he thought he knew what he meant to do.

He called one afternoon at Mrs. Ferguson's house. It was her "day," and the broad veranda, or loggia, overlooking the tennis ground, was well sprinkled with guests. Mrs. Ferguson, with smiling face, presided at her tea-table—an office which of late she had allowed Christine to fill for her. Gilbert looked round for Miss Lingard, in some surprise. She was not playing tennis—he did not know really whether she could play or not—and she was not sitting on one of the basket chairs or benches on the terrace, or walking up and down the garden-path. Greville put up his eye-glass, for he was slightly short-sighted, and surveyed the groups of visitors : pretty girls in white, young officers from Scanderia, matrons whispering together in the back-ground, older men consuming whisky and soda at a small table in a corner. Mrs. Ferguson's afternoon parties were popular and well-attended. But look as Captain Greville might, he could not find Miss Lingard.

"So you are just back from Cairo, Captain Greville?" his hostess said to him with a beaming smile.

"Yes, Mrs. Ferguson. I got back last night. I—I don't see Miss Lingard this afternoon : is she not well?" he asked, with a lame attempt to disguise some feeling of embarrassment. A moment later he wished

he had not asked the question ; for he had not seen that Mrs. Vibert was so near, and he did not like the malicious smile that flitted across those red curved lips of hers as she overheard the words. She turned aside, immediately, however, and Captain Greville was glad of it.

"Oh, didn't you know?" said Mrs. Ferguson, letting her voice sink to a confidential whisper.

"Know what?"

"She has insisted upon doing something for herself. You know she has been talking about it ever since she came. And when she found something to do, nothing would stop her."

"But what is it? She has not—*gone*?"

"Only next door," said Mrs. Ferguson, smiling.

Greville looked horrified. "Next door! To Colonel Lingard's house?"

"You forget that it has been let to the Viberts, Captain Greville. Mr. Vibert wanted a reader and amanuensis for part of the day. She sleeps here, and indeed she is here nearly every evening, for he does not often want her then——"

"And you allowed her to become a paid slave to that man!" exclaimed Greville, in tones of great wrath.

"Dear Captain Greville! I had no authority over her. And I know nothing against Mr. Vibert, do you?"

"Oh, no, no, nothing at all. But—I thought Miss Lingard meant to give lessons, or be companion to a lady or something of that sort, if she did anything at all."

"Much pleasanter to be reader and amanuensis to a man, I should think," Mrs. Ferguson remarked, laughing unrestrainedly.

"Oh, no doubt. Much pleasanter." And it was very plain from the way in which Captain Greville put down the emptied cup of tea, and pulled the end of his mustache, that he was in something of a royal rage.

What business had she to make herself reader to a *man*? To place herself in a position in which every idle tongue could mock at her? He felt a fierce jealousy of the man to whom she was giving her time, her attention, her powers of mind and the service of her hand. And all for a few miserable pounds a month! A pittance, the price, perhaps, of a polo pony, or a mess-jacket! And to sacrifice herself thus without consulting *him*! It was too bad, and he was determined on reproaching her for her unfriendly conduct.

"Won't you stay to dinner, Captain Greville?" said his hostess, in his ear. "Just ourselves, you know—and Christine. I know she will be home to-night, because the Viberts are dining out. Do stay."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ferguson." Yes, he would stay so that he could see Christine, and tell her what he thought of her behavior. If he could induce her to give up this engagement, he certainly would. He did not think that it was at all a nice thing for a girl to be reader and amanuensis to a man, although that man was over fifty, married, and an invalid; and he did not think that Miss Lingard had behaved well to *him*—Greville—in acting so precipitately. And if he had an opportunity, he meant to tell her so.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A REVELATION.

WELL, he thought that he had his opportunity. But like many other opportunities, it came too late to be of much real use.

While that tennis party was going on at Mrs. Ferguson's, Christine was sitting on the veranda of the house

that used to be her uncle's. Strange to say, she was quite alone. Mrs. Vibert and Daisy had gone to Mrs. Ferguson's, and Mr. Vibert had chosen to taken a solitary drive. He wanted some books, and meant to search the shops at Scanderia for them. In the meantime he asked Miss Lingard to be so kind as to make certain extracts for him, and to copy his notes.

She had done all this, and then sat wondering whether she was expected to wait until Mr. Vibert's return, or whether she could go away. From the Ferguson's tennis ground, she could hear the sound of voices, of laughter, and of the players' strokes : it was out of sight, but she could fancy all that was going on : the merriment, the gossip, the flirtations—she was young enough to look at her books and sigh, and to wish that she could join that careless crowd of pleasure-seekers.

The thing that had greatly struck her during the short time that she had been in Egypt was the aspect of the Europeans, and especially the European women—towards the serious side of life. Men had their business of money-getting, fact-collecting, their occupations for government or defence of the country ; and this kept them in touch with the larger interests of the world ; but what had the women to do but to see how much enjoyment could be extracted from their luxurious lives ? To Christine, brought up amid the multifarious little interests and duties of English home life, it seemed as if every woman in Mahatta were holding perpetual holiday. There were no poor even to care for : there were no newspapers to read (or they were left unread) : the best known names in Art and Science were unknown to politics (save where Egyptian and Turkish intrigue were concerned) were a dead letter. Women lived to dance, to dine, to flirt, to outshine their neighbors in party-giving, to ride, to bet, to gamble—and there was nothing else for them to do ; if these

occupations were not congenial to them, they became outsiders and of no social importance at all.

Christine saw and condemned. Nevertheless the pleasantness of it all appealed to her. She was young, and life was warm within her veins; and, until quite lately, duty had gone hand in hand with pleasure. She had always been petted and admired, in a quiet, well-bred way, in her own home and her own circle: to sink into such sudden insignificance as she seemed to have fallen now was rather hard to her to bear. She would have liked to go in her prettiest gown to that tennis party, and join in the fun and laughter of the others, as well as any "society girl" of them all. But she had chosen to work—to earn money for her family as well as for herself; and she knew that it was not possible to lead the two lives—she could not be with honey-bee and drone. She had chosen the lot of honey-bee; but she sighed for a little pleasure, and laughter, and sunshine, as all girls do: perhaps also, for a little love.

She was idly musing on these points, when a servant brought her a note. And inside, she read these words, written in pencil on a leaf torn from a note-book:—

"DEAR MISS LINGARD:

"Mrs. Ferguson has asked me to dinner to-night. May I say that I hope you will be at home, and that I may have a word or two with you in private sometime during the evening? I have something very special to say. Please do not trouble to answer this note: I write it only that you may know what I am hoping for.

"Yours most sincerely,

"GILBERT GREVILLE."

She was not to answer—in words. But when the time came, she was to give him his opportunity. Well—possibly she might. Only, if she did—

Her cheek took a rosier hue, and the hand in which she still held the letter began to tremble. She could not complete the sentence even to herself; but the thought that was in her mind was this: that the world would accuse her of giving this man great encouragement if she consented to arrange a private interview with him in Mrs. Ferguson's garden. She almost wished that he had not written: that he had not laid it upon her to decide the kind of friendship that should subsist between them.

But Gilbert Greville knew very well what he was doing when he sent that note. By that evening's result he meant to stand or fall. If Christine Lingard had any instinct of affection towards him, he knew that she would hear what he had got to say. She was still hesitating, with the color in her fair cheek and the flickering smile upon her lip, when a shadow fell across the little table at which she had been writing. She looked up with something of a start, and then grew suddenly pale. The man who stood bowing before her was Florian Lingard.

"May I not say good-afternoon to my cousin?" he began blandly.

Christine gave him a grave bow by way of answer. She hoped that he would go away at once. His very presence seemed ominous of evil. Scarcely knowing what she did, she slid her hand over Greville's letter, and drew it down to her lap. Whether Florian observed the motion or not, she could not tell, for his face was as expressionless as a smiling mask.

"I am glad I have found you alone," he proceeded. "It has occurred to me several times that I should like to give you a little bit of information that might prove useful to you. And although you are so much prejudiced against me, Miss Lingard, I would not willingly lose the chance of doing you a service."

"You are kind," said Christine, frigidly.

"I wish only to be just," he replied with modesty. "Excuse me: may I sit down? I have been to Mrs. Ferguson's, the place where one hears all the news, you know. I have just heard that Captain Greville is back from Cairo, and that he is dining here to-night."

Christine wished that she could keep back the flood of rosy color which mounted to her face when Gilbert's name was spoken. Why should she blush? And the very question made her blush again.

Florian sat watching her, with the usual half-malignant smile upon his lips. He seemed rather to enjoy her confusion.

"It is a little matter that I have often wished to mention," he said, "but your evident liking for Captain Greville has disarmed me——"

"My evident liking! Pray, what do you mean?" said Christine, sharply.

"Does it require explanation? Surely you and Captain Greville are undoubtedly very friendly?"

"We are good friends," said Christine, recovering her proud serenity, "but to speak of my 'evident liking' for him is not putting the matter in quite the right light. You are not English, and do not perhaps understand the full force of English words; therefore I excuse you."

Her eyes, now gazing out towards the sea, wore a look of such frozen dignity that for a moment or two even Florian Lingard was abashed. He resumed at last, somewhat sullenly,

"If I did not understand before, you have at least made it quite clear to me now. You are 'good friends,' as you say: and nobody can object to that—even his wife that is to be."

"Have you come here to tell me of Captain Greville's engagement to be married?" inquired Christine, with

such cold innocence of manner that again he felt himself baffled and could have stamped with rage.

"I did not know that it was announced yet," he answered, with an assumption of innocence almost equal to her own. "Popular rumors certainly assign him to Miss Daisy Touchwood: I suppose it is to her that he is engaged."

"I know nothing about it," said Christine; and in spite of herself, her voice was a trifle husky. "You spoke of his wife to be—that is all."

"We are only anticipating matters a little. The fact seems to be certain. And of that I am all the more glad, because I was once afraid that things would turn out differently."

Christine was mute. She laid her hand upon a book and made as though she would open it; but she listened still. Florian Lingard went on, with the same unpleasant smile on his smooth olive face,

"You may possibly not be aware that the late Colonel Lingard kindly offered your hand in marriage to Captain Greville as soon as he knew that you were coming out to Egypt."

"*What?*" cried Christine. The communication was made with such skilful rapidity that she had not time to arrest the words. Involuntarily she rose to her feet: her face flaming and her eyes alight.

"It is true, mademoiselle, I assure you. But for my father's sudden illness and death, I have every reason to suppose that the matter would have been satisfactorily arranged."

"You are leaving *me* out of the question, sir," said Christine, who was trembling in every limb with anger and shame.

Florian bowed. "Mademoiselle," he said, becoming as usual more foreign in accent and manner when he

meant to be especially impertinent, "I have no doubt but that you would ultimately have obliged your good uncle."

"It is preposterous," murmured Christine, and with head in the air, prepared to leave him; but his next words arrested her flying feet.

"You are quite at liberty to ask Captain Greville for yourself, my fair cousin, whether the proposal was not made. You will find that I speak the truth. My father expressed his intention of endowing you with part of his fortune. Now, as Captain Greville is on the point of engaging himself to Miss Touchwood, I think we may conclude that the dowry was his attraction in the first instance—*hein?* Without that dowry, he has not thought it worth his while to come forward, has he?"

Christine was standing with her back to him. She would not answer, and yet she felt compelled to listen.

"If your happiness had been involved, my dear cousin," Florian went on softly, "I would not have allowed money considerations to stand in the way. But Captain Greville did not choose to come and lay his case before me; and you——"

"Please say no more, Mr. Lingard," said Christine, very coldly. "I cannot understand your motive in bringing forward so painful a story. I do not wish to hear another word about it."

"It is simply that I want you to understand the true character of this gentleman."

"Thank you. We all know your opinion of Captain Greville, and his of you."

After delivering this parting shot, Christine walked deliberately away. Florian, who had risen from his seat, laughed aloud as he followed her with his eyes.

"She does not like that," he said to himself. "She thinks that the gallant Captain is a fortune-hunter, and she does not like it. I think he will not have a very warm

reception from her when he comes to-night. Did I not say that I would make her suffer, if I could, for the way in which she treated me ?”

He stole out of the garden by a side entrance ; for he was anxious not to be seen, even by the servants. It would not look well if they reported that he had been sitting on the veranda with Christine when everyone else was out.

He knew enough of Englishwomen to feel sure that his cousin would be humiliated in her own esteem when she knew that she had been offered, like a bale of goods, to a man whom she had never seen. He wanted to humiliate her ; for he had been bitterly offended by her refusal of himself, and would have been rejoiced to find an occasion for inflicting pain on her. But he hardly guessed how deeply Christine was likely to feel the wound that had been given to her pride.

Was it true ? Had she been offered to Captain Greville, with a sufficiently large bribe in the shape of dowry ? And had he accepted her, or had he refused ? From what Florian said, she gathered that he had made no objection to the proposal. And when her uncle was dead, and she was left poor and defenceless, he had, of course, backed out of his bargain ! Quite right, too : she was glad that he had ; but why, oh why had he ever become a party to so disgraceful a transaction ? It was unworthy of him—unworthy of her uncle—a disgrace also to herself. And she, knowing none of these things, had been friendly with him, and had never suspected the contempt which he had doubtless felt for her all along.

Thus Christine thought with rage and shame in her heart ; and the flood of tears that followed on these reflections did not take their bitterness away.

But what was she to do about the private talk with Captain Greville that evening ?

A sort of terror of it came over her. She felt that she could not bear to talk to him that night at all. The remembrance of her thoughts about him, and about his note, made her cheeks burn with shame.

"I must be very unlovable," she said an hour later, as she gazed with disfavor on a blurred and tear-stained image of herself in her looking-glass, "since no one will have me at a gift, and nobody cares one iota whether I live or die. Why should I go down at all to-night? I cannot bear the thought of seeing him and knowing—what I know now. I will say I have a headache: I will *not* go down at all. If he has anything to say to me, he must say it another time."

So Christine absented herself—much to Mrs. Ferguson's disgust—for the whole evening; and Captain Greville, piqued and repelled by her tacit refusal of a private conversation, concluded that she had taken this way of showing that she did not care for him, and that as a gentleman he was bound to persecute her no further by his advances.

CHAPTER XIX.

DEPARTURE.

It is said that "night brings counsel." It brought to Christine a certain consciousness of regret that she had allowed her emotions to get so much the better of her judgment. She could not but acknowledge that Captain Greville had acted only as she might have expected him to act—that she was not certain of what his reply had been to her uncle's extraordinary proposition, and that Florian Lingard's accusation of him as a fortune-hunter was the last one that ought to be laid to his charge. For

even if he were on the point of an engagement to Daisy Touchwood, which Christine did not believe, he could not be contemplating a mercenary marriage, for it was well known that Miss Touchwood had next to nothing of her own.

Christine reproached herself therefore for having been so precipitate in her judgment ; but at the same time she felt glad that she had escaped a meeting with Gilbert. She could not have behaved naturally to him after what she had just heard ; and even when she encountered him two days later, her face flushed a little and her manner grew slightly constrained, although she knew that she was foolish to let any such signs of embarrassment appear.

But, as she soon found, if she was constrained, Captain Greville was cold and haughty. He lifted his hat to her with grave courtesy : he replied to a little halting remark of hers with stiff politeness : it was evident that he was offended. Christine felt that she owed him some sort of apology.

"I am so sorry that I could not come down to dinner the other night," she said, looking at him with sweet deprecating eyes, "but I had a headache—really a very bad one : I assure you I was not fit to be seen."

They were on the race-course—the bright-looking green little course midway between Scanderia and Mahatta—where a polo match had been going on, and a sprinkling of ladies showed that the players liked the presence of their fairer friends. The match was over now, and Christine was strolling up and down the green enclosure with Captain Greville at her side. Other couples were doing the same thing, for there was a quarter of an hour to spare before the arrival of the train that would take the Mahatta people home. There was no opportunity for private conversation ; but surely a quiet word or two might pass between friends who knew each other well.

"I was sorry to hear it," said Greville, frigidly. "I hope you are quite recovered."

"Yes, quite." Then dropping her eyes, she went on softly: "If I could have sent you an answer to your note, I would have done so, just to explain."

"It was of no consequence at all, thank you," said Captain Greville, quite in his ordinary tones—a little clearer and harder perhaps than usual. "I quite understood. Ah, there is Jack Murray from Cairo: will you excuse me if I go to speak to him?"

Christine turned at once to rejoin Mrs. Ferguson, who was walking close behind with some friends of her own. She felt suddenly tired and chilled, as if a light had gone out of her sky, as if she had been walking for a long time, and was thoroughly worn out.

"My dear Christine, how white you look," Mrs. Ferguson exclaimed, as they reached home that afternoon. "You have been doing too much: you must remember that this place is not like England: you must not overdo yourself in this climate."

Christine accepted this explanation of her depression. Yes, she had been doing too much. she must rest and take things easily for the next few days.

The following day was Sunday, and on Sunday Mrs. Ferguson kept open house. It was a great day amongst Mahatta people for making calls: busy men, especially, made a point of going to see their friends on Sunday afternoons: army men, naval men; all streamed out on Sundays to the pleasant gardens and drawing-rooms that were open to them at Mahatta. Even when winter had come, and the branches of fig and acacia and lebbek trees were bare, Mahatta was a brilliant little place, and the gardens glowed with the scarlet leaves of the poinsettia and were fragrant with the breath of roses and mignonette. The winds blew coldly, however, and Mrs. Ferguson trans-

ferred her tea-table from the veranda to the cosiest corner of her drawing-room, where she was luxurious enough to have a fire—a fire in a real grate, exported from England purposely for her ! and where she and Christine entertained half a dozen or more visitors throughout the afternoon.

At about five o'clock, Captain Greville came in. Mrs. Ferguson was charmed : Christine uneasy, but observant. He still wore the grimness of countenance which she had noticed in him the day before : he was still short of speech, and stiffly, coldly polite when he spoke to her. But most of his conversation was addressed to Mrs. Ferguson, who remarked no difference in his manner.

"I have come to say good-bye, as I suppose you know," he said at last.

"Good-bye ? Why ? Where are you going ?"

"I am going to Cairo. I am ordered there. I have been expecting the change for a good while."

"You will be very sorry to leave Mahatta ?"

"Oh, I don't know. Yes, yes. I mean I shall be very sorry for many things—to leave my friends and all that, you know—but Mahatta is cold just now, and there's a good deal going on in Cairo ; the regiment is giving a ball next month : don't you think you could run up for it, Mrs. Ferguson ? I would send you an invitation if you could."

"Oh, thank you, I'm afraid it would be an impossibility," said Mrs. Ferguson. She looked from him to Christine as if to suggest something, but restrained herself. She did not understand the state of affairs at all. He and Christine used certainly to be very friendly ; and here he was talking of leaving Mahatta with scarcely a word of regret, and Christine sat with down-dropped eyes in a silence which was indifferent if not stony.

"I suppose they have quarrelled," she said to herself. "I wonder if I could do anything to reconcile them : they look very uncomfortable, poor things !"

But before she could put any of her charitable schemes into practice, Captain Greville had risen to take his leave. A friendly grasp of the hand to her, a touch of Christine's fingers, and he was gone. He was not likely to be in Mahatta again, he said, for several months.

Christine was resolutely gay for the rest of the afternoon. She discerned the speculation in Mrs. Ferguson's shrewd eyes, and shrank from giving rise to any discussion on the subject. She parried all the good lady's hints, laughed off her questions, and behaved with such discretion that Mrs. Ferguson's suspicions were quite laid to rest. It was only when she reached her own room that night, and could abandon herself to reflection, that she began to realize a little, what had happened.

She had lost a friend. That was the way she put it to herself. She did not say that she had lost a lover—though this perhaps would have been nearer the truth. She was still haunted at times by the memory of John Arbutnot, the man who had first caught her girlish fancy. She scarcely knew yet that his image had already been supplanted; that within her heart another shrine had been set up. What she saw now was only that she had been proud and that he had been easily offended, and that they had managed to become alienated from one another. And as he had once entreated her to let him be called her friend, she felt the change. But she would not show that she was distressed by it. She determined to give no one a chance of saying that she had quarrelled with Captain Greville. If she had made an error, she would suffer for it in silence.

Silence had not been the fashion in the house to which Gilbert proceeded after his visit to Mrs. Ferguson. He went to announce his departure to Mrs. Vibert and Miss Touchwood, with whom he found as usual a little crowd of men.

"Going to Cairo! You don't say so!" Mrs. Vibert cried. "Oh, I am so sorry, Captain Greville—so awfully sorry."

"Isn't it very sudden?" asked Daisy, standing by in her Sunday frock, all lace and embroidery and blue ribbons, and looking rather serious.

"Yes, rather. But it's an appointment, you know: can't help myself."

"It's too bad. You promised to go out donkey-riding with us next week."

"Come to Cairo instead," said Greville laughing; and then he devoutly wished his tongue had been cut out before he spoke the words. For Daisy seized upon them with effusion.

"Yes, let us go to Cairo, Evie!" she said, clapping her pretty hands. "I am sure Gervase would not mind. He always promised us a sight of Cairo, did he not? It would be awfully nice to go there now—you would show us round everywhere, would you not, Captain Greville? It would be ripping!"

For once Mrs. Vibert did not seem to agree with her sister. She let her eyes rest on Daisy for a moment, and then on Florian Lingard, who was standing in the background, as if anxious to keep out of Greville's way. Then she said sweetly:

"I am afraid Cairo might not suit poor dear Gervase's health. But of course we may go there for a day or two—if you will get us invitations for your ball at the Citadel, Captain Greville, we shall certainly run up."

"I will send you invitations with the very greatest pleasure," said Gilbert politely. His first feeling of dislike to the proposed visit had passed away: he grew reckless in his conviction that Christine had given him his dismissal, and that his life was his own to throw away as he pleased. He let Daisy draw him away with her

into the garden, where he talked nonsense to her, and talked it so well that the girl came back to the house with shining eyes and cheeks, and a proud satisfaction in the thought that he loved her after all. She looked so radiant that when the visitors were gone, Evelyn turned to her with a question—rather sharply put—

“Has he said anything?”

“N-not exactly,” said Daisy, “but very nearly.”

“Very nearly is as good as nothing.”

“Oh, no, Evie: not with a man like him.”

“Nonsense—a man like him! He is like other men, you may depend upon it. Daisy, don’t make a fool of yourself.”

For answer, Daisy tossed her head and walked away to the window. In a minute or two, Evelyn went on again:

“As for going to Cairo, that is perfectly ridiculous. I am not going to Cairo, for any amount of Captain Grevvilles.”

“I thought you wanted to go to the ball.”

“Perhaps I do; but I shall go one day and return the next. I am not going to leave Mahatta.”

“But why not, Evie?”

“Because we have taken this house for one thing.”

“There is another reason,” said Daisy, abruptly.

“If there is, it does not concern you,” returned Mrs. Vibert, with defiant positiveness.

“Does it not?”

Daisy turned round from the window, and fronted her sister. The evening light touched her golden hair, and lighted her big blue eyes, but it lent no color to her delicate cheek, which had grown strangely pale.

“Doesn’t everything that happens to you matter to me?” she asked. “Two years ago, Evie, you wouldn’t have said that. Don’t you remember that when Gervase proposed to you, your first thought was to make him

promise that he should give a home to me? How can you say that what affects you doesn't concern me!"

"For goodness' sake, don't be sentimental," said Evelyn, petulantly. "I can stand anything but that."

"I'm not sentimental, and you know it. I am only reminding you of things that really happened. And about your reason for staying here, I have an idea what it is, and I don't like it."

"I can't help that."

"Yes, you can. You know what I mean. Evie, it can't be true, can it? You are not staying at Mahatta, because—because——"

"Don't hesitate and stammer," said Evelyn, sharply. "Say out what you want to say, like a little prude as you are."

"Well, it's the first time in my life that ever I was called a prude," said Daisy, firing up as her sister meant her to do, "but I would sooner be called that than—than—something worse. Evelyn, tell me—are you staying here because of Mr. Florian Lingard or not?"

"Of course not. If you were not such a silly child, I should feel myself insulted by the question."

"Because," said Daisy, simply, "you seem to care for nothing and nobody but him just now. I know it's your way, and that you can't help it, but I do hope it is nothing else."

"I have no need to be lectured by a child like you, I think," said Evelyn, coldly.

"I am not lecturing. I only want to say that Gervase has been very good to us, and that you ought not to think of anything he would dislike. Wouldn't it be better for you to go to Cairo for a little time, Evie?"

"That you may make sure of Captain Greville, I suppose?"

"No, that you may make sure of yourself."

There was a silence after that. Daisy was half ashamed of herself for having spoken so warmly and so much to the point, and Evelyn was offended and angry; but the sisters were never at odds for long at a time, and they soon were ready enough to give each other the cool little kiss by which they expressed affection and to renew their old vow of perpetual comradeship. But Evelyn was not so obtuse to Daisy's remonstrances as she had seemed. For before long it transpired that she was doing her best to persuade Mr. Vibert to spend part of the winter in Cairo, and Daisy hoped, with a thrill of delight, that her words had not been spoken utterly in vain.

Mr. Vibert yielded at last to her persuasion, and in February he went with his wife and sister-in-law to Cairo. They were accompanied also by Christine Lingard without whom Mr. Vibert positively refused to leave home.

CHAPTER XX.

ON A BALCONY.

THEY went to Shepheard's Hotel at Cairo, for Mr. Vibert would not hear of any other hotel save the one which has almost an historical importance. Evelyn and Daisy both professed to be disgusted: Shepheard's, they said, was over-run with vulgar American tourists, and all the smart people went to the Continental; but on this point Mr. Vibert was inexorable. To Shepheard's he would go and nowhere else. So long as he could go to Shepheard's and have his patient and faithful secretary with him, he would be perfectly content. If not, he would go back to Mahatta in a week.

His threat frightened his wife and sister into entire submission to his wishes, and extreme civility and sweetness to Miss Lingard. Christine was indeed hard to persuade to accompany them. It looked to her almost like a pursuit of Gilbert Greville, and in this mood of recoil she said to herself that she did not wish even to see him again. On the other hand, she was anxious to see Cairo, and knew she might not have so good an opportunity another time. So at last she consented to go.

She did not see very much of Mrs. Vibert and Miss Touchwood when they were at Shepheard's. They were speedily surrounded by friends and acquaintances, and lived in a whirl of little dances, tennis and polo matches, drives and dinner parties. In the very midst of that city of matchless beauty, close to the majestic Nile and some of the greatest wonders of the world, they lived as they might have lived in London, or Paris, or Monte Carlo. The antiquities of the place were an unimportant detail to them. What they really cared about were the gayeties of the balls given by the regiments, and the athletic pastimes at Ghizeereh. The spirit of the past did not touch them at all.

To Christine, this seemed vulgar and stupid. Day by day she withdrew more completely into herself: she looked on at the prevailing pastimes with half-veiled contempt, and when she saw Captain Greville sharing in them all, she was inclined to lift her eyebrows and to say to herself that she had over-valued him, that he was no better than the other brainless fops by whom Mrs. Vibert was surrounded. Mr. Vibert's company was better than theirs; but even he was unsatisfactory, for he liked to read books on the history and antiquities of the place better than to explore the place itself. And Cairo is not a town which a young woman can explore without an escort. Christine had to resign herself to seeing very little after all.

But there was one unfailing enjoyment. When nobody wanted her, she could sit on the balcony—the celebrated balcony at Shepherd’s—and watch the never-ending procession of all sorts and conditions of men, an ever-changing phantasmagoria of Eastern life. The snake-charmer came to exhibit his pet at the foot of the steps, the water-carrier in scarlet and white clanked his brass discs together as he passed, with a lump of ice thrust into the mouth of his drinking vessel, sharp-faced dragomen quarrelled between themselves, and turbaned Orientals offered curious wares for sale. Down the street a train of camels was sometimes seen, some of them gayly caparisoned in crimson and gold, on their way to a wedding, others grumbling and snorting beneath enormous piles of green clover brought in from the country: solemn sheikhs on fine white donkeys ambled by, as if bound on some errand out of the Arabian Nights: close carriages rolled past, conveying harem ladies, swathed in veils to the eyes, for their daily drive; and between these signs and tokens of Oriental life came the well-known European touches—the well-hung barouche which carried Government officials to and fro, the English doctor’s smart phaeton, the dainty victoria of some great lady, or the well-appointed little pony cart of some young army man. There was constant variety, and the scene was always brilliant: Christine thought that she could sit there and watch it forever.

She was watching it one morning, when a step that passed beside her chair made her look round. A pale young man, in a semi-clerical garb, stood beside her; and, after a momentary effort Christine recalled his name.

“Mr. Hoskins!” she said. “I did not know that you were here.”

“I have been in Cairo for some weeks,” he answered in a melancholy tone, as he shook hands with her. “I was staying at the New Hotel. When I heard that Mrs.

Vibert and Miss Daisy had come to Shepheard's, I changed at once."

"Was that very wise of you?" said Christine, remembering his infatuation for Daisy.

"I don't know. I only know that it is a pleasure to me to sit in the same room with one whom I so fondly admire. I have got a seat at the same table as yourselves, Miss Lingard, not very far away. Then, even if she won't speak to me, I can sit and look at *her*."

"Shall I tell her you are here?"

"No, thank you, I think not. I guess she had better see me first for herself. You like Cairo, Miss Lingard?"

"It is unspeakably beautiful."

"So I thought when I came first," said Mr. Hoskins, with curious solemnity. "But I think I have sort of come to an end of it now. If it wasn't for Miss Daisy, I should go back home to-morrow. But I'm waiting to see if she will forgive me first."

Christine did not feel equal to offering any further remarks: she sat still and looked at a gay little Arab girl with long black plaits of hair and glittering black eyes, who was laughing and joking with a group of men and boys in the road below. Mr. Hoskins drew a chair to her side, sat down and watched the street also.

"I promised to send letters home to my congregation, descriptive of the scenes which I saw here," he went on at last, in a reflective monotone; "but I have not had the heart to write more than a few words on the journey hither, and the first view of the Pyramids from the railway train——"

Christine turned on him eagerly: "Was that not delightful? Did you not watch—and watch—until they came in sight? And your first view of those strange-pointed shapes on the horizon—shall you ever forget it?"

"Never—never!" said Mr. Hoskins, with fervor equal

to her own ; then, in a lower key, and with some diffidence :
“ And Miss Daisy—did she share in your emotion ? Did the sight produce the same effect upon her as on yourself ? ”

Christine laughed out. “ I am afraid not,” she said. “ Mrs. Vibert and Miss Touchwood played poker all the way from Sidi Gabr to Cairo with two young officers who travelled with them. I don’t think they looked at the scenery at all ; but I heard Miss Touchwood say that she had won seven and sixpence.”

Mr. Hoskins sighed gently and was silent : he seemed hurt by this vision of his beloved.

“ Don’t you see,” said Christine, almost below her breath, “ that she is not the sort of girl at all likely to agree with you about these things ? that you would never be happy with her, even if she cared for you—which she is not likely to do ? Be wise, Mr. Hoskins, and go away before you have seen her again : you are only giving yourself useless pain.”

But Hoskins shook his meek little head. “ I can’t help it, Miss Lingard,” he said, humbly. “ I sometimes think, as you do, that she is not very suitable to me. But again it seems to me that that doesn’t matter. I care for her whether she is suitable or not. I think—if you will allow me to use so big a word relating to myself—that it is my destiny to care for her.”

“ If it is your destiny, there is nothing more to be said,” answered Christine, repressing a smile.

“ Exactly, That is just what I feel. And it seems to me sometimes as if I might be of some assistance to her by and by. I can’t tell why : it is just a feeling that I have. It doesn’t seem very likely that I should be ever able to succor her or relieve her in any way, does it ? And yet I can’t get it out of my head that there is something I’ve got to do for her before I go back to America.”

“ Oh, Mr. Hoskins,” said Christine, half sadly, half

smilingly, "I am afraid, then, that you are spending your life upon a dream."

He looked at her wistfully, as if he would have appealed against her judgment if he could, but did not quite know how.

"It's rude to contradict a lady, isn't it?" he said, rather pathetically, "but you must allow me to remark to you, Miss Lingard, that there's something within tells me I am right and you are wrong."

Christine could say nothing in reply to this statement; and indeed no reply was needed, for Mr. Hoskins' attention was completely diverted by the sight of a group of people now coming up the hotel steps. They were the Viberts coming home to luncheon, and two or three of their friends with them. Foremost of all came Daisy Touchwood at Captain Greville's side. Christine thought that she had never seen her to more advantage. She was dressed in a cream-colored delaine, with a pattern of differently shaded pinks strewn at intervals over the surface—and trimmed largely with frills of cream-colored lace: her dainty waist was confined by a cream-colored ribbon fastened with a huge silver buckle; and her hat was a fanciful concoction of open-work straw, lace, and pink roses. Her face was alight with smiles; and she was evidently in such good spirits that she could afford to smile on foes as well as friends; for she nodded blithely to Christine, and accosted Mr. Hoskins with all her ancient friendliness.

"Why, Mr. Hoskins, I haven't seen you for an age. Evie, here's Mr. Hoskins, whom we met on the steamer. Are you staying here? Oh, that's all right: we shall see you again then. Are you coming, Captain Greville? It's time for lunch."

Greville had turned to speak to Christine: the others had passed on. Daisy waited a moment, and some of the brightness went out of her pretty face. There was a look

on Captain Greville's face which she did not like to see. What did it mean? Admiration—nay, more than admiration—adoration, reverence, love! It all leaped into his eyes for one mad moment, as he stood looking at Christine.

She seemed to him to have grown paler since he saw her last. Perhaps the greater heat of Cairo had blanched her cheek and thrown the pathetic shadow round her eyes. Sweet as ever, he thought her; but more than pensive now: say, rather, unutterably sad. Her white gown had the old fault (according to Mrs. Ferguson) of complete plainness: she never wore frills and furbelows on small occasions, as Daisy did; but the extreme simplicity of her dress had a charm for Greville which Daisy's had not. Miss Touchwood would not have been pleased had she known how low her attractions ranked in Greville's esteem, compared with those of Christine Lingard.

"Have you been ill?" Greville was saying abruptly, but in too low a tone to reach Daisy's ear.

"Not in the least, thank you."

"You look so pale."

"It is simply the heat: I am always pale," said Christine who was as red as a rose by this time. She showed by the pose of her head and the expression of her eyes that she was rather offended by the question.

"Forgive me," Gilbert murmured: he had no time to say for what, but it seemed to Christine that he meant more than an apology for the inquiry. She was obliged to let her eyelids droop; she could not bear the ardent gaze of those fine gray eyes, so near her own, and she knew that the tell-tale color was hot upon her cheek. Meanwhile Daisy stood by and looked on—a jealous, sharp, suspicious little soul—and hated Christine for the looks which Greville bestowed on her.

Captain Greville's want of self-control lasted but a min-

ute or two however. He had not known that she had come to Cairo with the Viberts, and the shock of seeing her in Shepherd's balcony was, for the moment, too much for him. His delight, his anxiety about her, *would* at first show themselves, although he had made up his mind that Christine did not care for him. It was only when she answered his questions with so cold and haughty an appearance, that he recollected himself and drew back mortified. It was true, then : she was quite indifferent to him, and his questions seemed to her a mere impertinence.

He was depressed and troubled as he went in with Daisy to lunch ; and he made her very angry by his silence and abstraction during the meal. He could not see Christine, for she was on his side, three places further down, at table ; but the remembrance of her sweet face, pale first as a lily, then ruddy as a rose, was not to be banished from his mind. All at once a question rushed into his mind, and insisted on an answer : *What did that blush mean ?* Why had she looked for a moment so conscious, so shy, so delightfully modest and gentle ? Surely some softer feeling for him was developing itself within her : she had some pity for him after all. What a dolt he had been not to insist on an explanation before he left Mahatta at all ! But he would know what she really thought of him before he was a day older. He would have no further doubt about the matter : she should say to him Yes or No.

He awoke out of a reverie to find that Daisy and Mrs. Vibert were planning all sorts of things—excursions, drives, picnics, for the next few days. Would he go with them to the Pyramids ? Would he dine with them at the Continental ? There was to be a performance at the theatre : would he care for a ticket ? and so on. The sisters never did a thing by halves : when they wanted a man's companionship they said so. And this time, Captain

Greville was complaisant: indeed he seemed almost grateful for their invitations.

Oh yes, he would go with them anywhere they liked. He would be most happy. But then he did not realize the fact that Christine was never included in the party. If he had known that fact, he would very possibly have made an effort to stay behind.

CHAPTER XXI.

ABDOS.

"BUT I'll tell you one thing that you ought to do," said Jack Forrester. "You ought to hear Abdos."

Jack Forrester was one of the "boys." There were always a good many boys, mostly belonging to British regiments, in attendance on Mrs. Vibert, and this was one of them—the best of the bunch, as Mr. Vibert once tersely expressed it. He was young, good-looking, high-spirited, and (it was reputed) well-off: popular, therefore, with women, but more popular on account of his mingled brightness and gentleness than for his good looks or his fortune. The party were sitting out on the veranda after luncheon: Mr. Vibert had gone indoors for a siesta, and Christine had also disappeared.

"Who and what is Abdos?" said Daisy.

"He's the great Arab singer: quite the Arab Patti, I assure you. Didn't you see the town placarded with bills about it? He's to sing at Helouan to-morrow night—at the Casino, you know."

"Helouan! That's miles away. I don't know that I want to go to Helouan for a concert."

"Oh, there are trains every half hour or so. There's one that would just suit you at ten o'clock to-morrow evening, and a return train about eleven. You could go quite well after dinner, and it wouldn't even keep you up late."

"But is it quite the right thing to do?" inquired Evelyn, with a faint assumption of matronly dignity.

"Oh, quite—quite: I wouldn't recommend you to do it if there were anything out of the way about it; but everybody goes to hear Abdos for once in a way. I daresay all the English people at the hotel at Helouan will be there. What do you say, Mrs. Vibert? shall we get up a party and go?"

Mrs. Vibert thought it would be delightful. Captain Greville consented to go, wondering in his heart whether Christine would be there or not. And it was finally decided that they should make the expedition to Helouan on the following evening: "provided," as Evelyn prettily said, "that Mr. Vibert had no objection." And in the long run it proved that Mr. Vibert had no objection at all. "So long as Greville is with you, I don't mind," he said to his wife in private. "He has some knowledge of the world, and the hang of things out here; but a whipper-snapper like Jack Forrester is not enough of an escort. Who else is going?"

Nobody else was going—not even Miss Lingard; a fact which very much annoyed Gilbert Greville, when he came to dinner on the night of the concert at Helouan. "You are not coming with us?" he managed to say, when he could get a word with her unobserved.

"I am not."

"But don't you care about it? Won't you come?"

Christine looked up at him and smiled. The coldness melted out of her beautiful eyes at the sound of his eager, anxious tones. A word more, a glance or two longer, and

the estrangement would be at an end. It had been only a passing cloud upon their friendship.

"I have not been asked—I cannot invite myself," she murmured back.

"But that must be merely an oversight. They only want reminding. Let me——"

"No, please do not, Captain Greville. After all, I think I would rather not go. I should make a fifth, you see—one too many."

"I wish I could stay at home," he said, casting a discontented glance around him. "But I'm afraid that would never do: they would not like it, and I suppose I came here on purpose. But I thought *you* were going."

The low-toned, confidential words were very sweet to Christine: they quite made up for any secret annoyance she might have felt at the absence of an invitation to the party. Greville's tone said very plainly: "I care to go only if you go," and the assurance was pleasant to her to hear. But they had not time for another word. Daisy's watchful blue eyes were on the alert that night. She was at Gilbert's elbow with an imperious summons.

"There's a wonderful torchlight procession going down the road, with colored lanterns and tom-toms and all manner of things. Come and look at it, Captain Greville: it is awfully pretty."

"Will you come, Miss Lingard?" said Gilbert, a request which made Daisy's eyes blaze as with blue fire for a moment. But Christine quietly refused, and Daisy bore her prize away in triumph.

The girl was *fey* that night. She was full of a reckless vivacity which nothing could tame or subdue. She laughed, talked, danced almost as she walked, and was as mischievous as a young kitten. Even Captain Greville, with his heart in Christine's keeping, was amused by her, and could not but respond to her sallies. He was all the

more inclined to abandon himself to her festive mood when once they had left the hotel for the railway station, between nine and ten o'clock. Not that he was anything but faithful to the thought of the lady-love whom he had left behind; but, such is the nature of man, it was somewhat easier to him to amuse himself with Daisy Touchwood when Christine was not there.

They drove in two victorias to the station, Mrs. Vibert escorted by Jack Forrester, and Daisy by Captain Greville. There had been a word or two spoken by the sisters beforehand on the subject of this division.

"Now mind," Daisy had said, with a laugh which veiled a silent determination, "you are to let me have Captain Greville to myself to-night. You are not to monopolize him, Evie."

"I shall be quite content with Mr. Forrester," said Evie, calmly. "But do try to bring him to the point, Daisy. Gervase is beginning to make unpleasant remarks. He said to-day that he should ask him his intentions very soon."

"Oh, that is only Gervase's grumpy way. But don't interfere with us to-night, Evie—if we should get into a railway carriage by ourselves, or anything."

"All right. Captain Greville will take care of you. I don't much mind what you do with him," returned Mrs. Vibert, as she gave the finishing touches to her complexion with a powder-puff, and surveyed herself and her toilette in the looking-glass. "There, am I all right? *You* are very fetching to-night in that sailor-hat, Daisy: I wish I looked half so nice."

"You? the Beauty! I wish I had your eyes," said Daisy, with a sigh. "I don't believe Captain Greville admires my style. He never takes his eyes off that Miss Lingard when she is here."

"Make the most of your time, then," said Evelyn, signifi-

cantly ; and Daisy resolved to take her sister's advice to the utmost of her ability.

No one who saw her would have thought her capable of deep-laid designs on a man's heart or fortune. She looked simply guilelessly pretty and light-hearted, like a child. Her golden hair and cloudless blue eyes were infantine in hue ; her face had the tender roseate bloom of a sea-shell or a rose-leaf ; and the dark blue coat and skirt which she wore, with the silk vest and white sailor hat were eminently calculated to show off the tints of her hair and complexion to the best advantage. Even Christine, standing on the dimly-lighted balcony to see the party start, could not resist the conviction—with something of a jealous pang—that she had never seen Daisy look so well before. She was armed for conquest at all points.

At first, however, it seemed as if their scheme for the evening was about to fail. Mr. Forrester had mistaken the hours of the trains. There was no train to Helouan until between eleven and twelve o'clock, and they could not arrive there until after midnight.

"We can't go, I'm afraid," said Greville, glancing at young Forrester. "It would be much too late."

"Not a bit of it !" exclaimed Forrester, gayly. "We might just as well go by the later train. These native concerts are not over until two or three in the morning. The fun will be just beginning when we get there."

"Oh yes, let us go, let us go !" cried Daisy.

"Can we get back again ?" Mrs. Vibert asked, doubtfully.

"There is a train back to Cairo at 1.30. We shall be back by two in the morning : it is not so very late—not later than you would be at a ball," urged Forrester. "And it is a great pity not to hear Abdos, you may never have the chance again."

"What do you think, Captain Greville?" said Mrs. Vibert, looking up at him, with her most ingratiating smile. "Would it be very improper? With you and Mr. Forrester to protect us, surely we should be quite safe."

"Of course we should. Oh, we must certainly go. I shall be dreadfully disappointed if we do not. Captain Greville, do agree with me: do say we may go—it all depends on you." So Daisy cried, with sparkling eyes, and flushed, gleeful, anxious face.

Greville tried a remonstrance. "It will be very late—and perhaps the company may not be altogether pleasant——"

"But we could not come to any harm when *you* were there;" said the girl, coaxingly. "You would take care of us!"

"No, I don't suppose you would come to any harm; but it is rather an unusual thing—rather an escapade you know—" And the two men consulted each other for a moment with their eyes over the ladies' heads.

But Greville was clearly in a minority. Forrester was as eager to go as were Mrs. Vibert and Daisy; and at last the only question became that of the best way of spending the interval of time which remained before the departure of the train. To return to the hotel and get something to eat and drink seemed the most sensible way of employing themselves: and to the hotel they drove accordingly.

Jack Forrester and the sisters were in the highest spirits, and disposed for the most boisterous joking and laughter; but Greville was secretly annoyed. He had not meant to let himself in for this kind of thing, he said to himself. He hated the return to the hotel, the astonished looks of the hotel porter, and waiters, the polite curiosity of such guests as remained in the drawing-room. He was glad that Christine was nowhere to be seen. He had a moment's

consultation with Forrester as to whether he could not go home and leave him—Jack—to manage the business ; but Jack protested so vehemently against Greville's meanness, as he called it, in trying to "back out," that he immediately withdrew his proposition.

They had champagne and sandwiches at one of the little tables in the vestibule, and before long—to Greville's great relief, it was time to send out for carriages again, and drive to the railway station. Here the ladies were hurried into a first-class compartment, while Greville and Forrester kept guard at the door until the train was actually ready to start. It struck the keen-witted Daisy that even careless Mr. Forrester was rather anxious that they should not be seen on their midnight excursion. But there were none of their English acquaintances on the platform : there were only a number of Arabs in blankets or burnous, or black-coated young Turks with the red fez and little plaid shawl, on their way also to Helouan to hear Abdos sing.

The train steamed out of the station into the curiously dark and lonely land. Looking from the windows, one could see no gleam of light from any building, no glimmer even from the blue blackness of the sky. They seemed to be gliding away from the haunts of men into some unknown, mysterious world. So at least it seemed to Greville, as he cast furtive glances into the darkness, and wished himself far away from the lamplight and the laughter and the cigarette smoke of the over-heated railway carriage. Both Evelyn and Daisy were smoking and laughing at the top of their voices, as Jack Forrester narrated some unusually funny story. Greville turned away from the glimpses of mysterious shadow, and resigned himself to frivolity. What was the use of being serious ? If Christine had been with him, he could have been serious enough, or happily and pleasantly glad, as time and occa-

sion served ; but with Daisy Touchwood as a companion, it would be better to seize the fleeting moment and take any enjoyment that could be got—not the highest, perhaps, but enjoyment of a kind—

“Thanks, Jack : yes, I’ll have a cigarette. What’s that funny story you are telling ? I know a better one than that !”

And Greville plunged into the midst of it ; much to the relief of Daisy, who had noticed those sombre glances into the darkness and was wondering what they could mean. Thenceforward she had no reason to complain. Greville’s laugh was merriest, his speech most mirth-provoking, of all for the rest of the journey.

The train slackened and drew up at Helouan. “Now then,” said Jack Forrester, “here we are. There are the lights of the Casino : come along, Mrs. Vibert : we shall just be here for the best of it.”

And the four English people hurried along in the track of the Arabs who were streaming along the unlighted road, and across the garden, which led to the Casino of the hotel at Helouan. The moon was just rising : its broad face looked like a great brazen shield just lifted over the low-lying desert plains. Greville pointed it out to his companion. “Almost a pity to go into a hot room and hear some bad singing, isn’t it ?” he said pleasantly. “It would be much nicer to go for a stroll by the river.”

“Oh ! no, no, it wouldn’t,” said Daisy, laughing feverishly. “I want to hear Abdos, of all things in the world ! And it is so deliciously improper to be out at Helouan at midnight, isn’t it ?”

“Is it ?” said Greville laughing. He had almost forgotten his scruples by this time. “I don’t see anything remarkable in it after all.”

“Think of what all the old fogies will say !” cried the girl,

with a little hop and skip. "Think how horrified Gervase will be! And Miss Lingard——"

She caught herself up, knowing well enough that she was unwise to have uttered the name; but she was too late. Gilbert's brow clouded at once. "Yes," he said, with sudden gravity and formality. "I am afraid you are right. This is not an expedition to be talked about."

Daisy shrugged her shoulders and dropped his arm. They had reached the Casino door.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT MIDNIGHT.

It was not at first sight a very remarkable entertainment. They entered first an anteroom, and then a large square hall, which was very much like any other concert room. There was a platform at the end, a number of benches facing it, and a gallery. But points of difference began to make themselves felt, as the four English visitors made their way to the top of the room, where seats were found for them on the front bench. The gallery, for instance, consisted of a row of boxes, like those of a theatre; but each one was screened by a long blind of coarse white lace, which half revealed and half concealed the veiled ladies of the harems, allowed by their Arab lords to enjoy the pleasures of a concert. One could see a black eye glancing, a white hand moving, from time to time, especially when the arrival of the English women produced a certain amount of excitement. There were no other English people in the room; indeed, but for a sprinkling of French and Italians, the audience seemed to be exclusively Arab. Many of the men were in true native dress, while others

wore the black suit and red tarboosh which is gradually superseding the more picturesque Arab costume.

Mrs. Vibert and Jack Forrester had chairs given to them, but Daisy and Captain Greville subsided into seats on the foremost bench.

"How they do stare!" murmured Daisy into Gilbert's ear. "One would think they had never seen Englishmen before. Do you think we ought to be here?"

"Oh, yes, I don't suppose it matters."

"And where is Abdos? There is a whole string of performers on the platform. They look exactly like a troupe of Moore and Burgess minstrels, except that they are not black," said Daisy rapidly. And the comparison was not inapt; for the platform was tenanted by a number of men in a semicircle of chairs, whose position bore some likeness to that usually taken by negro minstrels. They were dressed in European clothes, with the ordinary red fez, and each man held a musical instrument—mandolin, guitar, or Egyptian violin, which he occasionally touched as an accompaniment to the droning song which was going on. But the eyes of all these men, as well as those of the audience, were generally fixed on the figure of a fat man in the middle chair: a rather puffy-looking, pale-faced man with humorous eyes, who also held an instrument on his knee, but lay idly back in his chair with crossed legs and a cigarette in his mouth, as if he had no mind to exert himself at all.

"Is that Abdos?" Daisy queried eagerly. "Why doesn't he begin? How he smiles and looks at us! Ah, look at him now."

For the man suddenly joined in the song, which immediately died into the softest murmur, so that his voice and the notes of his guitar were the only ones that could be heard. He seemed to sing a couplet or two, generally ending with a high, long-drawn note, like the wail of a bag-

pipe ; the other performers and the whole audience, uttered exclamations of rhythmical kind, evidently expressive of their interest in and admiration for the song, between each couplet.

"What is it ? what is he saying ?" Daisy asked.

"It is just a love song," Greville answered. Then, as she still looked curious, he proceeded : "I do not understand much Arabic myself, but as far as I can tell, it is just a repetition of the old conventional phrases : 'my love is like a rose, her eyes are diamonds, her neck is a tower of alabaster—' then they all utter that long-drawn 'Ah !' for admiration, which you hear."

"And how they do seem to admire him ! Look at that man beside you, Captain Greville."

Greville looked, and laughed. The man beside him was a thorough Arab in white "jellabeah" and turban : his brown face was alight with a perfect passion of delight, and he was rocking himself backward and forward in ecstasy, occasionally extending his hands and crying "Ya, Abdos !" in tones of the wildest fervor. Nor was he the only man thus excited. Here and there could be seen Arab listeners in the same state of almost convulsive ecstasy, rocking themselves, and ejaculating the name of the singer at frequent intervals, as if beside themselves with joy.

The singer did not pause. As in all Oriental music, his song was in the minor key, with strange discords and odd sharp intervals, and wailing sustained notes, which had a curiously plaintive sound. Greville liked it, and also found plenty of interest in looking at the absorbed, rapt expression of the faces near him ; but to Daisy, the proceedings soon became monotonous. She put up her hand to her mouth and yawned, until Greville turned towards her with a smile.

"Are you tired ? Do you think the game was worth the candle ?"

"Yes, yes, indeed I do." She did not want Greville to think that she was tired of his society. "It is most curious and interesting; but is all rather the *same*, isn't it? And the room is very hot: it would soon make one feel just a wee bit sleepy, don't you think?"

"Poor little girl!" said Gilbert, laughing.

"Oh, I do not really want to go to sleep," said Daisy, with dignity. "I only thought it might in time—good gracious, what's happening?"

The concert was over: that was all. Abdos's last melodious wail had died into silence: he and his companions had risen from their seats and rapidly retired, and the audience was quietly pouring itself forth into the night.

"Well, this *is* a sell!" said Mrs. Vibert, as they met at the door. "The concert was nearly over when we arrived. And now we've ever so long to wait for the train."

"Half an hour and five minutes," said Jack Forrester, consulting his watch in the moonlight. The crowd of Arabs was melting away: there was little noise or confusion: in a few minutes the English party found itself almost alone in the garden that lay in front of the Casino.

Greville laughed rather enigmatically at his companions' blank faces; but forbore to mention that he had always been against the scheme. "We had better loiter up to the station and wait there," he said. "We shall find a seat for the ladies."

"How dull to go straight to the station," said Daisy. "Let us take a walk round the garden first: I want to breathe a little fresh air. There are seats here, too: suppose we sit down and rest."

"Do as you like," said Mrs. Vibert, who took this proposal as an intimation to her to retire into obscurity; "but I shall walk on to the station at once. In this out of the way country, one never knows when a train may not arrive."

"That's not the case at Helouan," said Jack, laughing. "The trains are extremely punctual : it is their only fault. Come along then, Mrs. Vibert."

The two went forward and were speedily lost in the confused lights and shadows given by moonbeams and railway lamps ; while Daisy and Captain Greville were left face to face, looking at one another.

"We had better follow them," said Gilbert, coldly. He did not like this air of being left behind with Daisy : he began to think there was a purpose in it.

"What for ?" said the girl, hardily. "Here is a bench : come and sit down. It is five minutes' walk to the station and we have half an hour. Where's the hurry ?"

She seated herself as she spoke, and Captain Greville, with an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders, seated himself beside her. But for some minutes neither of them spoke.

"Well," said Daisy at length, breaking the silence with a deep sigh. "I wouldn't have believed it. To think of sitting here in this lovely moonlight, with some one who does not say a word to you. I call it unkind."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Touchwood. I was waiting for you to begin."

"I daresay. Did you want so much to sit in a stuffy station that you must needs sulk because I am keeping you here ?"

Greville was slightly vexed. "I hope I am not sulking," he said, dryly. "But I must remind you that it would not do to run the slightest risk of missing our train, as there is not another until seven o'clock in the morning."

"What fun !" giggled Daisy. "Just supposing——"

But there was a rigid look in Greville's face which rather frightened her.

"We won't suppose anything so awful," she said soberly.

"But sit down a minute or two on this garden bench: I really am very hot and tired, Captain Greville, although"—somewhat plaintively—"you don't seem to believe it."

Greville was too soft-hearted to resist the appeal.

"I am a great brute," he said, penitently. "I ought to have remembered how tired you must be. You have no business out of bed at this hour—a little girl like you, you know. What is your sister about to let you sit up so late?"

This speech quite restored Daisy's equanimity. She laughed up in his face, and answered at random.

"This is a funny experience, isn't it?" she said. "I never did anything so odd in my life before. How far away is the Nile—from where we are now?"

"About six miles."

"And is this hotel with the Casino the only hotel in Helouan?"

"No, there are two more, I believe. This is the Railway Hotel. Are you rested now? Don't you think we had better go on slowly towards the station?"

"Presently. Captain Greville, do they burn the electric light all night here?"

"Only till the last train has gone. After half-past one they put it out. Miss Touchwood——"

"Oh, Captain Greville, I do wish you wouldn't always call me 'Miss Touchwood.' It does sound so formal; and we are old friends, are we not?"

"Old friends do not always call each other by their Christian names."

"Don't they? Very stupid of them, then," and Daisy made a mischievous little grimace, which—fortunately perhaps—Gilbert did not see. "But never mind what other people do. Everybody calls me Daisy—won't you call me Daisy too?"

Greville made a diversion. "Upon my word," he said, abruptly, "Forrester's watch must have been slow. It is much later than I thought. I can hear the rumble of the train in the distance already. Come, Miss Touchwood, we must really make haste."

Daisy was in a mutinous mood. "I won't go till you have answered me," she said. "Say 'Come along, Daisy,' or I'll stay here forever."

"Come along, Daisy, then!" he said, impatiently. "And pray make haste about it, for I am sure that we have only just time for the train."

She jumped up, with a gay, triumphant, little laugh. "How fidgety you are! I am sure we have heaps of time. Jack Forrester's watch is always right. The train won't be in for another ten minutes."

"Come at once," said Captain Greville, his tone rendered stern by sudden anxiety. "I tell you that it wants only two minutes to the half-hour, and that I see the lights of the train coming up. We must run for it."

"It will be all right. Evelyn will keep the train for us," said Daisy, heedlessly. She had not the slightest intention of being left behind, but she did not believe that Greville was at all in earnest. A whistle from the approaching train tended to convince her that he spoke the truth. "Is it really coming? But we shall easily catch it. Take hold of my hand and pull me along: let us have a good run up the road together. What fun it is!—Ah!"

Her chuckle of delight was changed to a cry of pain. They had left the garden and were tearing madly, hand in hand, up the road to the station, when the check came. Greville was obliged to pause. Daisy had stumbled, and sank down on the ground.

"What is it? My dear child, you must come. Holla!" —shouting at the top of his voice. "Wait for us: *aspetta*,

attendez, audak." He used every language that he could think of at the moment. "Are you hurt? I must carry you, then."

To his dismay, Daisy did not answer. She had turned very faint, and in the bright moonlight, he could see that her face was ghastly. "I think I am going to faint," she murmured after a moment's silence, and collapsed once more upon the ground as if she could not move again.

Gilbert was at his wit's end. His only hope was that Mrs. Vibert would either delay the train, or, on seeing that Daisy was not there, would return to find her. But Mrs. Vibert was quite easy in her mind about her sister, and fancied that she was safe with Captain Greville in one of the foremost carriages of the train. As for supposing that she could be left behind, she never dreamed of such a thing.

In desperation, Greville simply lifted the girl from the ground, and carried her for several steps. But he stopped with a groan, when he saw the uselessness of the effort. The train was already steaming out of the station on its way to Cairo, and they were left behind at Helouan.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISSING A TRAIN.

"It's gone!"

The exclamation burst involuntarily from Captain Greville's lips. He stopped short in the sandy road, with Daisy in his arms, and stared blankly after the retreating train.

"Put me down, please," said Daisy, faintly. "Is it—the train?"

"The train has gone," said Gilbert, shortly and sharply—not that he was exactly angry with Daisy, but that he was utterly bewildered and deeply concerned by the turn that things had taken. He let her slide from his arms and stand leaning against him in the road. He could see that she was very pale.

"The train—gone?" repeated Daisy, as if she could not at first understand him. Then, awakening to the reality of what he said, she uttered a low cry of alarm. "Gone! Oh, it is impossible. It must have been another train. If you will help me to the station, I think we shall catch it still: Evelyn will be waiting for us. Let us make haste."

"I assure you, Miss Touchwood," said Greville, "that it is useless now for us to make haste. That was the Cairo train: the last train; and we have missed it. We shall have to stay here until seven o'clock in the morning."

"But Evelyn must be at the station," persisted Daisy, scarcely alive even now to the difficulties of the situation. "Evelyn and Mr. Forrester. We will consult with them what we are to do. Oh dear, my foot! It's a sprain, I think: it made me feel quite faint and sick for a minute or two."

"Lean on me," said Greville, gently. "I will carry you altogether if you like, as I did just now—No? Then we will make our way to the station, and see whether Mrs. Vibert and Mr. Forrester are still there. Perhaps we shall meet them on the way."

He spoke with more cheerfulness than he felt. He was very much afraid that Mrs. Vibert had gone by this train: otherwise there would surely have been some sound or sight of Forrester before this time. However, Daisy seemed to have great confidence in her sister, and it was possible that Mrs. Vibert might still be waiting; so Gre-

ville gave the girl his arm, and gently piloted her up the little stretch of sandy road to the railway station.

The clerk was on the point of locking the office-doors and retiring for the rest of the night. The lights were out: the platform was deserted. No sign of Mrs. Vibert and Forrester could be seen. The clerk, and a blue-gowned Arab who officiated as porter, testified to having seen an English lady and a young officer in the train. What had happened was only too plain: Evelyn had trusted to Greville's care of Daisy and Daisy's care of herself, and had gone away without her.

"So here we are, you see," Gilbert said, with a faint attempt at jocularitv, which, however, evaporated into thin air when he saw how white and weary was the small face upturned to him from the wooden bench on which Daisy had been established. "And we must make the best of the situation. I suppose we had better go to the hotel."

The bench on which Daisy was sitting was outside the station-building, and the smart young Levantine clerk was out of sight—perhaps that was why Daisy felt herself at liberty to give way. She took out a very smart lace handkerchief, and began to cry.

"Oh, Captain Greville, what can we do? Evelyn will be in such a fright; and I don't know what Gervase will say. What *will* they think has become of us!"

"I'm sure I can't say," Captain Greville replied, rather grimly. "But they will know by breakfast time. It's awkward, of course, but I don't think you need take it so much to heart, Miss Touchwood. Why, it isn't like you to give in so soon."

His voice softened involuntarily as he spoke. It was a new thing to see Daisy—usually so gay, so careless, so debonair, reduced to tears.

"We had better not delay too long," he said, after a

pause. "If you will lean on me, or even let me carry you, we will make our way down to the Railway Hotel. I dare say the people there can give you a room."

"Oh, no, no!" said Daisy, with a fresh burst of tears, "I can't go to the hotel. It would look so queer—I have no luggage or anything—I can't bear the idea of it."

"But it can't be helped. We have five hours before us. We cannot spend it here."

"Why not? Why not? We should be quite comfortable. It is a lovely night—perfectly warm; and we should be ready for the train when it came up."

"Perfectly impracticable," said Captain Greville, with a touch of impatience in his voice. "Don't you know that the night air gives Europeans fever? If you dropped off to sleep here, your temperature would be about 104° to-morrow morning."

"I don't care: I would rather stop. I don't mind about fever—I should like much better to stay here." With malicious intent, she added, "*You* can go to the hotel if you like; I will sit here till you come back."

"This is pure folly," said Greville. He was inclined to be a little angry with her unreasonableness, but on second thoughts he became gentle and pitiful. She looked such a child, sitting there in the moonlight with the tears glistening on her cheeks, and the blue eyes widened with distress. She had taken off her sailor hat, and was fanning herself with it: the golden head stood out against a background of darkness, like the head of a pictured saint. She was only a pretty, worldly, little girl, and Greville knew it; but the moonlight spiritualized her face and made it absolutely beautiful. "Look here," said Gilbert, much more softly than he had ever spoken to her before, "you must not be a silly child. I am awfully sorry for the mess we are in: it was all my fault for letting you rest so long, and I shall take all the blame of it when we are explaining

matters of course. But we need not make things worse than they are. It won't do for you to get chilled and have fever; so the best thing for you will be to come quietly down to the hotel with me. I'll speak to the manager or anybody in authority that I can get hold of, and get you a room where you can rest till morning; and then I will call at the hotel for you, and take you back to Cairo by the morning train."

"How good you are! how kind you are!" Daisy whispered. She did not object again: probably because she felt that Greville was quite capable of whipping her up in his arms bodily, and carrying her, willy-nilly, to the Railway Hotel.

"Do you think you can walk? Which foot is it? the left one, poor little foot!" said Gilbert, tenderly, as if he were talking to a child. "Now lean on me as much as you can: I will help you."

He put his arm quite round her, and thus guiding and supporting her, she managed, after a weary little journey, to reach the hotel door. Here, as she had nervously anticipated, there were doubts and delays. The sleepy manageress, hastily summoned from her slumbers, looked at Daisy with suspicion and some dislike. However, money will do most things: and in a little time, she was shown into a bare little bedroom where she was recommended to lie down and sleep till morning.

"You are sure you will not let me miss the train again," she said to Captain Greville, when she left him in the hall.

"Certainly not," said he, gravely, and commented to himself on the readiness with which she was affixing the blame of their mishap on him.

"You will not oversleep yourself?"

"I am not going to sleep," a statement which Daisy did not in the least believe. Nevertheless it was quite true,

for Greville spent the night in walking about the garden, smoking cigars on the benches, and exchanging remarks with anybody whom he could get to speak to him.

At seven in the morning, Daisy met him again. In spite of fatigue and anxiety, they both laughed a little as their eyes encountered one another. "What wrecks we are!" the girl exclaimed, cruelly putting into words the very thought that had occurred to Greville. She was paler than usual, and there were great blue shades beneath her eyes: her dress, too, had the crushed appearance which showed that she had been lying down without removing it. Gilbert looked even more dilapidated than she did; for he wore his dress clothes, without even a light overcoat, and his eyes were heavy from want of sleep.

"We shall feel the better for a change of clothes and some breakfast," he said, cheerily. "How is your foot?"

"A good deal better. I got a stick from one of the servants, and I can walk pretty well with it." She looked down at her foot with a little added color in her face, as she spoke: "It is not very bad now."

"I was afraid you had seriously hurt it last night: I am glad it is so much better," said Gilbert, a little surprised by her evident embarrassment.

"Yes, I thought it would be much worse this morning. It does hurt still," said Daisy, as defiantly as if somebody had been doubting her statements. They were making their way up to the station, but she had refused Gilbert's arm, preferring to trust to the stout jereed which she had got at the hotel.

"I am sorry. Did they bring you coffee before you came away? I ordered it."

"Yes, thanks." Her manner was curiously ungracious, Gilbert thought. He wondered what was the matter: he supposed that she was blaming him for the whole affair.

Well, it was his fault, after a fashion : he ought to have insisted on her going to the station when Mrs. Vibert did. The only thing to be done now was to get her out of the scrape. For he saw very distinctly that she, and he too, were involved in a scrape which might have consequences. People *would* talk ; and if anybody saw her come back to the hotel with him at that unearthly hour, there would be no end of gossip. He only hoped that Mrs. Vibert had been discreet and said nothing about her sister : if only no disturbance had been made, all might yet be well.

Of course he did not give Daisy a single hint as to what was in his mind. He made her as cozy and comfortable in the railway carriage as circumstances permitted ; he encouraged her to smoke one little cigarette by way of keeping up her spirits : he told her one or two funny stories and made her laugh. By the end of the journey, her little pale face was tinged with color again, and her eyes were bright. She chattered away freely to him, and had evidently forgotten the misgivings of the morning. But she grew quieter and apparently a little nervous as they approached Cairo.

The train drew up in the station, and Greville opened the carriage door. Daisy, who was watching him, observed that he drew back for a moment with knitted brows and bitten under-lip, as if he had suddenly perceived something or somebody that he did not want to see. She leaned forward quickly.

"Who is it? Is it Evelyn—or Gervase?"

"No," said Gilbert, quite calmly, "it is Miss Lingard."

She felt, rather than saw, that his brow was dark and his cheek pale, and the knowledge came to her with strange certainty that it was this woman—Christine Lingard—whom he loved, and feared at that moment to meet. Some instinct told her so : she did not know why.

She, too, turned pale, and it was a very wan little face that presented itself to Christine's view when the two girls met upon the platform.

"Oh, you are here! I knew you would be here," said Miss Lingard, coming forward with much more animation of manner than usual, and taking Daisy's hands in her own with conspicuous friendliness. "I told Mrs. Vibert you would be sure to come on by this train." She did not look at Greville, only at Daisy, whose pale face was cold as a stone, and who held the little hands which Christine had tried to caress clinched and rigid against her sides. She did not seem to perceive the coldness of Daisy's aspect, or if she did, she put it down to fatigue and fright. "You must be very tired," she said, pityingly; for there, was something in the business that roused the latent motherliness of her nature, and made her gentle even to the girl that she had hitherto disliked. "Tired and hungry too. I hope you got something to eat at the hotel."

"You understand—we missed the train last night," said Captain Greville, who was beginning to be struck by the fact that she looked only at Daisy and would not vouchsafe a glance at him.

"Oh, yes, I understand perfectly," she said; and there was a note of indignant scorn in her voice which made him wonder what on earth she was thinking of him and of the night's adventure. "We had better get a carriage and go to Shepherd's at once; your sister is very anxious about you. You are lame, too: won't you lean on me?"

"Captain Greville's arm is the strongest," Daisy was beginning a little petulantly; but Christine cut her short at once.

"Captain Greville had better bid us good-bye: I have got a carriage waiting. Miss Touchwood, come with me, please,"—in a lower tone—"it will look better,

there are some people you know just outside the station."

Daisy yielded. She was feeling a little bit frightened. She was glad of Christine's presence and protection when she was making her way to the carriage, and saw two or three of her English acquaintances eyeing her rather curiously. Captain Greville followed them moodily, and tried to help them into their carriage, but Christine sent him away at once.

"You had better get back to the barracks and change, I should think," she said in a very chilly voice. "You will scarcely like to be seen about the town as you are just now, I suppose."

Greville fell back and lifted his hat. Daisy turned and smiled at him, but the smile was thrown away. He was staring in dumb discomfiture at Christine, whose whole bearing was meant to express complete oblivion of his existence. It was quite evident to him, however, she was bitterly angry; and for the moment Greville thought of nothing else. An ejaculation of which she would very much have disapproved escaped his lips at last; and it was echoed by a hearty laugh from the lips of Jack Forrester, who came up and clapped him on the shoulder.

"So here you are!" he said. "Old man, there's the devil to pay. Come along, and I'll tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE PYRAMIDS.

THE sun was blazing on the yellow sand, drawing out the color by its very intensity, and making it look almost white. The Libyan Hills seemed almost dissolved in sunshine, the slender line of the minaret which, far

away, rose above the Cairo Citadel, piercing the blue distance with needle-like sharpness and erectness, might have been fancied to waver and tremble in the haze of that Egyptian heat. Overhead the sky was jewel-like in blueness, and the reddish tints of the rose-granite Pyramids glowed as if from some internal fire which made them hot to the touch. The sweep of desert seemed utterly destitute of life, for the slow-moving creatures that passed across it, brown-coated camels and sheeted Bedouins—resembled it so closely in color that they appeared like integral growths of the soil and not like beings of independent existence. A bow's length away, and the Sphinx keeps her everlasting watch towards the east: the scorn of unnumbered generations sits upon her brows; the passage of centuries has set its seal upon her lips. Her presence hovers over all that remote mysterious land unseen, half-hidden by the gathering sands, she guards the entrance to the desert and laughs to scorn the enterprise, the conquests, the inventions of civilized man.

But all this is as it looks from the shadow of the Great Pyramid, on the side turned away from the blazing afternoon sun. You have only to turn a corner, and you come upon a different scene altogether—a crowd of chattering guides, of English tourists and Arab loiterers, with strings of camels and donkeys, pacing up the road which leads from Mena House to the Pyramids. Here is the dark opening into those mysterious galleries with which the mighty building is threaded: here the adventurous tourists who wish to climb the Pyramid begin their ascent: here is all the bustle and clatter of a show-place, the conventional admiration, the learning, the jabber of guides and the coming and going of American tourists, which make you feel that the tomb of Cheops deserves to be ranked as a very second-rate picnic place indeed. That is its vulgar and commonplace aspect; but there is another side.

Christine Lingard was wise enough to get away from her party for a little while, and, sitting down in solitude and silence, try to get the true impression of the place upon her mind. She got away from the beaten track, only a few steps certainly; but a few steps counts for miles in the desert—sat down on a stone, and looked at the wonderful structures before her at her leisure. She had stepped into the shadow, which strikes cold to the very bone of the sun-steeped travellers, but she was unconscious of the creeping chill. Perfect silence reigned around her: the great wall of rock shut out all sound from the other side: it was almost as though she were alone in the desert with the three Pyramids and the mighty Sphinx. For in the distance rose the dim towers and minarets of the Citadel; further away, to the right, could be seen the blue, wedge-like shadows on the horizon which represented the Sakkara Pyramids. Her guide crouched in the sand a few yards away; but he was so silent, so motionless, that he seemed less like a human creature than some brown life-sized statue thrown carelessly down upon the sand.

Christine sat almost as motionless as he. Her eyes looked dreamingly out to the distant line of the horizon, half obscured by a purple haze of heat; but, in spite of the associations of the scene, her mind refused to fix itself upon the images of the past. It was the present, after all, which had taken possession of her; and what were far-off dynasties to her, compared with the interests of her own life that were at stake. Her heart and mind were not free enough to dwell with any satisfaction on the history of the Pharaohs.

She was idly turning over the sand at her feet with the spike of her parasol, which the shadow had enabled her to lower, when she saw her guide lift his turbaned head from the sand with the watchful motion of a wild animal

markful of a stranger's step. She had heard nothing, but, on turning her head, she saw that a man had, like herself, stepped into the heavy shadow, and was advancing with quick steps towards her. The sun-dazzle was still in her eyes, and at first she did not see that it was no stranger. Then, when he was almost close to her, she discovered with a thrill that was half horror, half delight, that it was Gilbert Greville.

He had formed one of the party with whom she had come, but she had hitherto avoided him. When last she saw him, he had been in devoted attendance upon Mrs. Vibert and her sister. He had seemed scarcely conscious of her existence, and she had sedulously turned away her eyes. Now, however, he was evidently seeking her out, for he came towards her, over the loose rough sand and scattered granite fragments, with quick, decisive strides, which showed that he did not mean her to elude him. Christine recognized the impossibility of escape. She had not meant to speak to him—but, after all, it was probable that he was merely bringing her a message from the Viberts or some other members of the party, and would go away when he had delivered it.

In the glance she gave him as he advanced, she saw that he was haggard and weary-looking: aged even, if that were possible, in the last few days; with an air of depression which seemed unnatural in the newly-accepted lover of Daisy Touchwood. Christine's lips curled as she said the words to herself. But at the bottom of her heart there was a great pity for the man who had—as she conceived it—thus thrown away his heart, his life, his very soul.

He stood beside her, and was silent. The walk across the desert had tired him: he was even a little out of breath. Perhaps that was the reason why he did not speak.

"Does Mr. Vibert want me?" said Christine, looking round. "Have they sent you for me? I am coming: I only wanted to be alone for a minute or two, to see whether I could make myself *feel* the centuries that have passed since these were built. I will come at once if any one wants me."

"Nobody has sent me for you," said Greville, curtly. "I wanted you myself—I wanted to speak to you. May I break in upon your solitude for a few minutes?"

"Sit down and rest by all means. But it seems a pity to talk of ordinary things in the presence of these great piles, does it not? That was why I came away from the others."

"I know—and you would prefer to be alone. Bear with me for a minute or two, if you can, Miss Lingard. There is very much I should like to say, but which I mean to refrain from saying. But just one thing—I must tell you one thing if I die for it—if I never speak to you again."

His voice had grown harsh and rough. Christine trembled a little, but was not afraid. She had a sudden sense of her power over this man. She could silence him with a word: she could cut him short at any moment; and so—and so—she could *dare* to listen to what he had to say. She fixed her eyes upon the violet haze of the horizon, and clasped her hands a trifle more tightly upon her knees. Yes, she would listen, for the first and last and only time, to what he had to say.

He seated himself on the sand beside her, but a little lower down, so that he could look up into her face.

"I saw you when you slipped away," he said. "I knew what you were doing—you wanted to get away from the noise and racket and nonsense down yonder, and look at these things by yourself. It was like you to want that. I would have given the world to come away with you. I

followed as soon as I could. I persuaded the others to go and look at a half-buried statue a mile or so from here, and that left me free to look for you."

"Captain Greville," said Christine, hesitatingly, "I do not know—why——"

"Why I should look for you?" he interrupted quickly. "Why I should speak to you in this way? Forgive me: bear with me if you can. You know that prisoners condemned to die are always allowed a little licence in their last hour: they may say what they please, in consideration of the fate that awaits them. Consider me a man under sentence of death, and let me say a few last words, without weighing them too nicely."

Christine had turned very pale: his words gave her a pain which she could not define—a sympathetic pain, perhaps, for from every one of his words and tones breathed the suffering of a wounded spirit. She could not speak, and Greville took her silence as a permission to continue.

"When I saw you there, sitting alone in the shade," he went on, "mute and motionless as the Sphinx herself, I must confess that I hesitated. It seemed wrong, cruel almost—to disturb that perfect peace, just as it would seem a profanation to hear the shouts and laughter of street revellers among these dwellings of the dead. But again I said to myself that just as the Sphinx has kept her everlasting calm for centuries, undisturbed by the myriad passions that have raged around and beneath her, so you—you—in your ideal heights will never be moved one iota by the frailties and follies of the men upon whom you look down."

Was it Greville who was speaking—Greville, stirred out of his habitual nonchalance, and quitting the curt speech of the youth of our day for words which were made eloquent by the passion which inspired them? Christine listened

with amazement, as if she were in a dream, in which she could neither stir nor speak.

"If I could have chosen my time," he said, in a more ordinary tone, "I would not have intruded upon you now ; but you know how I am tied—bound,—how difficult it is for me to get a moment free. I could not have come here now without a mean pretence ; I was to order dinner or some such meal at Mena House for our party : it was my only chance of getting away."

"I do not want to hear this, Captain Greville," said Christine, turning her face away.

"I beg your pardon," he said, instantly. "I assure you that I have not come here with any intention of saying what would pain you. What I want to say is quite harmless : it will not hurt you ; and to say it will be a great"—with a quick, short breath—"a great—an inestimable—relief to me."

"It is better sometimes," she said, in a low voice, "not to purchase a present relief at too high a price."

"That is true," he answered. "I will remember that. But I am not going to say one word that I shall have cause to regret afterwards, and I consider myself perfectly justified in explaining to you"—he hesitated a little here—"something that may have puzzled you—if you have condescended to bestow a thought upon the subject."

"Oh, no explanations, please !" said Christine, making a movement as if to rise from her seat on the sand ; "they are always worse than useless, and I am sure they are not necessary now."

"Let me be the judge of that, for once," said Greville, earnestly. "For God's sake, don't move ! Don't go away, leaving me unheard, you could not do me a worse injury just now. I am suffering enough already without that."

"You !" she said, with a chilly lightness, which far from expressed her genuine feeling towards him at that

moment: "you suffering? I supposed you to be the happiest of men."

"You turn your head away when you say it—you cannot look me in the face and utter what is so manifestly untrue. Look at me and tell me, then, whether I am the happiest of men—Christine, look at me."

The utterance of her name roused her to some anger: she turned and looked him full in the face, intending to rebuke his presumption, but what she saw disarmed her and silenced the angry words upon her lips. For the face which was uplifted to hers was not that of a happy man. It was worn, haggard, pale, with eyes heavy from want of sleep, and tense muscles that quivered and contracted in nervous agitation as Christine's gaze rested silently upon him. He looked like a man borne down by a very weight of trouble; not by any means what Christine had just named him "the happiest of men." And she knew this, and her eyes filled with tears as she looked at him.

"You see how it is with me," he said, reading the reply in her face, "but it is not *that* which I want to speak of. We will leave 'happiness' out of the question for the moment: it may come in time. I have no reason," he went on, loyally and honestly, "to say that it will not. But you and I called ourselves friends once, did we not? We have not known each other certainly for very long; but we did once count ourselves friends. And, therefore, I want to clear up a little misconception which I believe has arisen in your mind. May I?"

"If you think it worth while," she said, sadly. "But indeed, I do not think that there is any misconception in my mind of anything that you may have done; and it is often so much better not to rake up the past——"

"But it is not the past, it is the present I want to speak of," he answered her. And as she kept silence, he turned and looked at her more closely. Her head was bent, her

eyes fixed absently upon a little collection of stones in her lap. One of her hands—the hand nearest him—lay in the sand at her side: he moved his own right hand towards it—warily enough: he touched it timidly, and was glad to find that though it did not respond to his touch, it was not drawn away. It lay there, the fingers pressing downwards into the soft sand; and he covered it with his own, with a firm yet light touch which was like a caress.

And thus they sat, for a pregnant moment or two, hand touching hand, soul, perhaps, meeting soul, yet knowing themselves to be almost as irrevocably divided as though they had lain for ages, like the great Egyptian kings of long ago, dead and buried and forgotten in the shadow of the Pyramid.

CHAPTER XXV.

“GOOD-BYE!”

GREVILLE spoke at last. His words came slowly and in a very low tone, but each one was distinctly audible in the hot, still air. Christine listened, as if soothed to quiescence by the gentle pressure upon her hand.

“I have heard an accusation made lately,” he said, “which it is impossible for me to repel in every quarter. Indeed, there are many people whose opinion is of no importance to me: I do not care whether they think ill of me or not. But *you*—your opinion I *do* care for. It seems that Mr. and Mrs. Vibert both believed, and expressed their belief to the world at large—that I had purposely missed the train the other night at Helouan—that I tried, actually tried to compromise a young girl who was

in my charge, so that I might get her into my power and force her to marry me. That is what I have been accused of, Miss Lingard, and that is what I wish to ask you not to believe."

"I do not believe it," said Christine. "At first, I acknowledge, I was startled by what Mrs. Vibert said when she came home without her sister. That was why I was so angry—so rude to you, I am afraid, when I met you afterwards at the railway station. But I heard the explanation later. Of course I know that you were delayed by Miss Touchwood's accident."

It was a little stiffly spoken, but Greville took no notice of her manner. "*You* believe me—*you* understand how the whole thing was an accident," he went on somewhat eagerly, "and I think the Viberts understand too; but you know how things get abroad in Cairo. Why, my own chief sent for me and questioned me about it, the day before yesterday: and I had to explain matters to him as if I had been a culprit. It is not a situation in which a man likes to find himself, through no fault of his own."

There was a suppressed fierceness in his voice, as though he would have liked to avenge his wrong upon the person or persons who had occasioned them.

"My denial—my contradiction—goes for very little, it seems," he went on, bitterly. "Friends and foes alike combined to tell me the best way out of the difficulty, as they phrased it. Impossible to keep people from talking, they all said: I had got myself and this young lady into a scrape: the best way out of it—for an honorable man—was—Well, you know the way I took: I need not dwell upon that part of it. What I want you to know is simply this—that the whole affair was an accident, a blunder from beginning to end; and that I should deserve to lose my commission in the Queen's service, and my character

—in *your* eyes, if for one moment I had dreamed of persuading a girl to put herself into a questionable position with me for my own purposes.”

“Indeed, Captain Greville, I never thought anything so bad as that,” said Christine, firmly. “I blamed you in my heart for carelessness, but for nothing more.”

“Then you were more charitable than most people. Though what motive there could have been for my wanting her to miss that train, it would be hard to say. But the fact remains : her character was, it seems, at the mercy of the Cairene gossips ; and—there was only one thing in the world that I could do.”

Christine bowed her head. She knew well what that “one thing” had been. The inconsiderate chivalry of his nature had impelled him to make the one reparation in his power for an accident which he had been totally unable to avert. Mrs. Vibert’s hysterical tears, her husband’s stony accusations, the advice of his friends, had all tended to the one result. He had asked Daisy Touchwood to marry him : she had consented ; and he was the most miserable of men.

“I wanted you to hear this from my lips,” Greville went on, rather brokenly, “because I knew—there were things which might seem incomprehensible—I must seem to you very weak—I——”

He broke off suddenly, and flung himself round a little so that he lay on the sand face downwards. In this position it was his mouth that touched Christine’s hand : he pressed his lips to it and said nothing more.

He quite expected that she would be angry—that she would draw her fingers sharply away—would rise, perhaps, and threaten to leave him and never to speak to him again. But she sat silent and motionless ; and when at last he lifted his face from her hand and ventured to look at her, it struck him with a sense of discomfiture and

dismay to find that she had covered her eyes with her left hand and was crying quietly.

"Christine!" he ejaculated. "Christine! Forgive me. I did not mean to hurt you—to offend you. But you know what it means. I can't help it. I love you—you only. I shall never love another woman; and yet I have promised—Is it possible, darling, that you could ever have cared for *me*?"

He was kneeling beside her now, with one arm half round her, shielding her from the observation of the Arab guide who was blinking lazily at them from his covert in the sand, with a sly smile upon his cunning, handsome, brown face. At a word, he would have taken her entirely in his arms and kissed her boldly upon the lips, for all the world to see; but he was a little afraid of her anger still, and did not know how far he might be allowed to go.

It was not very far. In another moment, Christine had removed her hand from her eyes, swimming with tears although they were, and was looking him steadily in the face, with a brave smile upon her lips.

"Don't spoil what you have done already," she said. "You know I think that you have acted rightly—like a loyal, noble-hearted, English gentleman. You were right, and I hope—I trust—that you will one day be happy but—in the meantime——"

"In the meantime," cried the man, passionately, "I love you and none but you; and you love me, Christine."

"If so," she said, in a very low voice, "we may be unhappy, but we need not be weak."

"I know nothing of weakness or strength: I only know that I love you. My sweet, it is wrong, not right, for me to marry a woman whom I do not love, whom I do not even respect. It is dooming myself to worse than death. Save me, darling: I am brave enough,

and strong enough, to bear any condemnation from the world, if only you will stand by me. Let us face it together. You know well enough that *she* will not care: she will not suffer. It is we that will have to suffer—for her sake. Oh, my love, is it worth while?"

"Would it be worth while," she asked, "to purchase pleasure for ourselves at the cost of our self-respect? We were saying just now that some things were sold at too high a price. Perhaps—for us—happiness is one of those things."

"But it *would* be happiness," he said, wistfully, "for you as well as for me, Christine."

"Yes," she said, her eyes dreamily seeking the far-off horizon, "yes, it would be happiness; but it must not be."

Again he put his hand on hers; but this time she put it by.

"No," she said, in a graver and firmer voice, "it must not be. If we did this thing we should be committing a treacherous action—have you not thought of that? We had better go mourning all our days, better be miserable and unloved our lives through, than gain good things for ourselves by treachery and deceit. You have given your word, and you must abide by it. You know the old lines—

"I could not love thee, dear, so well,
Loved I not honor more."

They are hackneyed enough; but they are very true to me. For I do love you, yes, I do—I will not be so cowardly as to deny the truth—but, just because I love you, Gilbert Greville, I will not counsel you to break your word to a girl that trusts you. I could never look in your face again without thinking that you

had given up your honor for me. I should despise myself for it; and I think that in time I should come to despise *you*."

"You need say no more, Christine," said Greville, huskily. "To be despised by you! no, that indeed I could not bear. And yet—if it were only some one who—Have you really thought to what you are condemning me? of what my life will be—with——"

She cut him short. "We are bound by our promises," she said. "You have given your word. And you will be good to her, and love her, and do your best—your best—to forget me."

"No, heaven forbid that!" said Gilbert. "I will remember you all my life as the best woman I have ever known." He rose from his kneeling posture and stood looking down at her for a moment, then turned aside with a groan. "To think of all I have lost!" he muttered. Then in a louder voice, "Why did you not come to me that evening, when I asked to speak to you? Did you not know what I meant? Were you cold, frightened, shy? what was it? If I had asked you then—would you have said yes?"

"I do not know what I might have said," she answered. "It is better not to think of these things."

"I took it for granted that you did not want to hear it, and I hastened my departure to Cairo in consequence. I was a fool! Christine, your uncle wanted me to marry you. Did he mention his plans for your future in any letters to you or your mother before you came out?"

"No. But I—I heard it. And that you refused me," said Christine, with a faint smile. "You were quite right. But I—when I heard it—I felt vexed, ashamed, and that was the reason why I refused to come down on the evening when you wanted me."

"We were neither of us very wise, were we?" said Greville, drawing nearer to her, as if he had more fellow-feeling for her in a mistake than when her wisdom was unimpeachable. "And we pay dearly for it now. Who told you, Christine? Mrs. Ferguson?"

She shook her head.

"It was not—surely it was not—the brute that calls himself Florian Lingard? It was! He obtained that piece of information by eavesdropping, and this is the use he makes of it. That is another item in the score I have against that man. I feel sure that he will have to pay it some day, Christine: no proofs on earth will convince me that he is my old friend's son."

She gave him a look of assent and gratitude; then, rather wearily, she rose from her seat.

"It is very little use to discuss all these matters, I think," she said. "We cannot mend or mar them: they are beyond our control. See, how the colors are changing! It must be growing late. The others will be back at Mena House and wondering where we are!"

Following the direction of her eyes, Greville glanced across the desert. The sun had begun to sink, and its level rays were turning the edges of scattered stones and lofty tombs to gold. The red sides of the pyramid glowed as with fire, and a hundred little rays of light dazzled the eye from countless particles of shining silica in the sand. The distant spire of the Citadel stood up like a line of fire against a rosy haze. The scene was more beautiful than ever, but there was something weird as well as beautiful in the suffused redness of the evening light. Christine's guide had risen and turned himself to the east: his arms were raised to the heavens, then lowered to the ground as he bent in the prescribed genuflexions duly paid to the

names of Allah and the Prophet. Gilbert took Christine's hand and held it closely in his own.

"This is to say good-bye, Christine."

"Yes," she said faintly. Her lips had suddenly turned white.

"We shall be as strangers henceforward, I suppose. We must not even be friends, must we? No, I could not bear to meet you only as a friend. So we must say good-bye—unless, unless—Christine, is it too late? Must we part when we love one another so, my darling? Say but the word, and I——"

She pushed him aside. "Never!" she said. "Never! never. It would be better to die than not be true."

"So here you are!" cried Daisy's high voice, as she and a number of other people on donkeys came sweeping along the beaten track a few minutes later, and encountered Captain Gilbert Greville standing like a statue with his back to one of the stones of the Great Pyramid. "What are you doing here, with your arms folded and your eyes fixed on vacancy, as if you were just going to be photographed? And where have you been all this afternoon, Gilbert? I thought you were coming after us to see that ugly old statue of Rameses or somebody?"

"I—I must have taken the wrong road," said Captain Greville, a little vaguely. "I did not see you anywhere, so I came out here to have a look at—the Sphinx."

"All by yourself?" queried Daisy, a trifle sharply. "Miss Lingard wanted to see the Sphinx too, I believe: perhaps you have been showing it to her ladyship."

The other riders had discreetly passed on, leaving Miss Touchwood to her rightful proprietor. Greville stood with his hand on the donkey's rein, and his eyes cast down, almost as though he had not heard the question.

"Eh?" he said at length, as if he were awaking from a dream. "Have I been showing the Sphinx to Miss Lin-

gard, do you say ? Certainly not ; but I saw her just now. She has gone back with her guide to Mena House, I believe. I ordered dinner there by the by, and we are to drive back to Cairo by moonlight. Is that what you wished ? ”

“ Oh yes, it'll do well enough,” said Daisy. She was vaguely dissatisfied both with her fiancé and herself. “ I can't stay here all the afternoon talking. Why didn't you get a donkey or a camel or something for yourself, Gilbert ? You'll be late for dinner, if you don't take care.”

“ There is plenty of time. Don't let me detain you,” he said, taking his hand from her bridle. “ I will follow you.”

Daisy went forward without a word. Audacious as she could be, there was something about Greville which occasionally checked and frightened her ; and at such times, she was as meek as a little girl just out of the schoolroom.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

“ I AM sure I cannot tell what you want, Daisy,” said Mrs. Vibert, placidly ; “ I thought you had got your heart's desire at last ; and here you are in the sulks as much as ever. You are growing horribly bad-tempered, I can tell you that.”

It was the morning after the expedition to the Pyramids. Everybody was tired and more or less cross. Captain Greville had sent word that he could not come to Shepherd's at all that day : Mr. Vibert had “ an attack ” and was confined to his room : Miss Lingard was looking very pale and owned to a headache. Evelyn and Daisy, thus

thrown on each other's society, sat on the balcony in the most secluded spot that they could find, and wrangled in sisterly fashion over any and every subject that came uppermost.

"I'm not nearly so bad-tempered as you are," was Daisy's ready response. "As to my heart's desire, that is just sentiment, you know. And I hate sentiment."

"Oh, do you? It looked like it last night when you and Gilbert were mooning about the Pyramids together, and couldn't be found at all when we wanted to start for the drive home."

"There was no sentiment, then, I can assure you," said Daisy, in an injured voice. "He was scolding me."

"Scolding? After being engaged for three days only? I wouldn't stand that," said Mrs. Vibert.

"It was a sort of scolding. You know I was vexed at his having been away all the afternoon, and I believe he was with Miss Lingard all the time, although I could not get it out of either of them; so to pay him out, I talked to nobody but Jack Forrester and Mr. Walker all dinner-time, and would not say a word to him; and he said it was flirting. He was as disagreeable as Mr. Hoskins himself."

"Oh, by the by, I saw Mr. Hoskins again in the hotel, yesterday," said Evelyn. "He was hanging about, looking absolutely miserable, waiting for you, I suppose."

"I'll flirt with Mr. Hoskins—I'll flirt with anybody I choose," said Daisy, with a sudden burst of anger, "but I will not be lectured by Gilbert."

"You are in one of your silly tempers again," said Mrs. Vibert, with great equanimity, "and you don't consider that you may be cutting your own throat. You have played your cards exceedingly well so far, and I should be careful for the results, if I were you."

Daisy became thoughtful at once.

"That's exactly what I wanted to speak to you about,"

she said, in a much more temperate tone. "Of course I know—it was a little difficult to bring him to the point, but you don't suppose he wants to back out of it, do you?"

"If he tries to back out of it, I think Gervase will soon make him alter his tone," replied Mrs. Vibert. "I must say that's one way in which Gervase has proved himself useful: he has shown himself able to bring your lovers to book, Daisy. He was very decided—very prompt."

Daisy's fair face turned crimson. "You needn't talk as though Gervase forced him into proposing," she said.

Evelyn uttered a little laugh. "Well, it came rather near that, didn't it?" she said.

Daisy did not choose to answer the question. "You really oughtn't to talk in that way, Evelyn," she remonstrated. "You might do it when somebody else was near; and fancy the rage Gilbert would be in if anything of that sort reached his ears. For my sake, you ought to be careful."

"I am careful enough. I don't think you need be afraid, my dear child. Gilbert is not the man to back out of anything he has undertaken."

"I wish Miss Lingard were not here," said Daisy, abruptly.

"Miss Lingard! Ridiculous! If she tries to get up a flirtation with him, Gervase shall send her away."

"Oh, it is not a flirtation I'm afraid of exactly," said Daisy, leaning her cheek a little wearily on her hand. "It's Gilbert's opinion of her that I don't like. He thinks her perfect."

"Make him think you perfect too," said Evelyn, lazily. "Daisy, I believe you are not clever enough for your part."

"I don't know," said Daisy, rather helplessly. She was biting her lips and turning her face aside to conceal

the fact that her eyes were full of tears. "Evelyn," she almost whispered, "do you think that he would ever forgive me if he knew that I—I made him miss the train at Helouan on purpose?"

Evelyn looked at her with only partially veiled contempt. "How is he ever to know," she said, "unless you are fool enough to tell him yourself!"

The sisters were silent for a little time: then Mrs. Vibert uttered an exclamation in a peculiarly soft tone.

"Ah! there is Mr. Florian Lingard."

"Has *he* followed us down here?" asked Daisy, with asperity. "It's very bad taste of him, then. He knows that he is not wanted."

"Nothing of the kind; *I* want him," said Evelyn. "I wrote to him to come."

With the soft color coming and going in the cool clear oval of her cheek, with a strange new radiance visible in her hazel eyes, she looked so lovely as she made this audacious avowal that Daisy's indignant expostulations died upon her lips. "I do wish you were not quite so friendly with him," she murmured rather feebly; but Mr. Florian Lingard was already upon them, and she could say no more.

He was very smartly dressed, she noticed; arrayed, as it were, for conquest, and evidently pleased with his personal appearance. He had shining boots and a flower in his buttonhole. "A little more," as Daisy sarcastically observed to herself, "and he would have been the only man in Cairo with a top-hat." To this height, however, he had not ascended, top-hats being an almost unknown article of attire in Egypt; but he had donned the most irreproachable of "bowlers," and allowed the top of a crimson silk handkerchief to be visible in his breast-pocket. More than all this—he carried a bouquet of the most beautiful flowers, which he presented to Mrs. Vibert with

a low bow and a speech of florid compliment, which Evelyn blushed and Daisy laughed to hear.

At Mrs. Vibert's invitation, he sat down beside her; and immediately entered upon a low-toned conversation, evidently not meant for Daisy's ear. Daisy, being thus excluded, looked round for amusement of a different kind. Christine Lingard was seated on a balcony at some little distance, and for want of something to do, Daisy lounged across to her, and threw herself into a basket chair at her side. She did not like Christine, but it was fun to talk to her about Gilbert. Captain Greville's name always brought a change of some kind or other to Christine's face; Daisy had never yet been able to satisfy herself what that change meant, and she returned again and again to the charge in order to find out.

But on this occasion, her amiable intentions were frustrated. Christine was talking to a mild, elderly clergyman, who was explaining to her that he looked on everything in the world, the Pyramids included, "from a literary point of view." And when he had finished, a spinster of forbidding aspect, on the other side of Christine, began to recount her experiences of social life in various cities of the East. Cairo, it seemed, had been a disappointment to her in this particular aspect. "*Everybody* called upon me in Beyrout," said the lady, with a wriggle of her skirts which expressed great contempt for the Cairenes, "but nobody takes any notice of me here."

Daisy sat and yawned openly, feeling some scorn for Christine's quiet and kind attention to these uninteresting people. At last, when a brief pause occurred, she touched Christine on the arm and said:

"I say, Miss Lingard, there's the hotel omnibus from the station. Do look; there are sure to be some funny people arriving. That's rather a pretty girl with the old lady—Why, goodness gracious me, what *is* the matter?"

She might well ask. For, with a stifled cry, Miss Lingard had started to her feet, and was running down the balcony steps to meet and greet the new-comers. There was a handsome old lady, Daisy saw ; a pretty young girl nicely dressed ; a fine-looking old gentleman, with a white mustache and a distinctly military air.

"Who can they be ? Friends of hers, I suppose. Perhaps they will take her away altogether, and that will be a blessing," reflected Daisy. "They don't look bad : can they be relations ?"

She sat and stared while Christine, quite moved from her usual tranquillity, came up the balcony with her hand laid affectionately within the old lady's arm. Daisy heard a word or two as they passed. "Who would have thought of seeing you in Cairo, mother dear !" Christine was saying. "And Nell, too ! It is delightful !"

Daisy did not hear the answer, but Mrs. Lingard began to explain her presence in almost an apologetic manner.

"My dearest, I really can hardly believe it myself ! I assure you it was not my doing : it was your godfather's. He and Nell concocted it between them, and said that you would like the surprise. I am sure I don't know : I don't care for surprises myself."

"I like *this* kind of surprise very much," said Christine, brightly. "I think it is delightful, and it was very nice of the General to persuade you to do it."

"But you mustn't call him the General, Christine," said Nell, upon whom the white-haired old gentleman beamed with pleasure at the mention of his name. "We have adopted him as an uncle, and he is to be called Uncle Roderick henceforward."

"My god-daughter won't object to that, I hope," said the adopted uncle—usually known as General Forrester,—with a pleased and kindly smile. "She used to be very

fond of me when she was a child, though of course she has forgotten me now."

"No, indeed I have not," said Christine eagerly. "I remember perfectly well how kind you were to us, and I am delighted to see you here."

"I have a young scapegrace of a nephew in Cairo whom I wanted to see," said the General lightly, "and my yacht was lying idle, so when I discovered that you were here and met your mother and sister at Cannes, I thought it would be a pleasant trip for us all to come here together."

"Do you know Uncle Roderick's nephew?" asked Nell. "He's in one of the regiments—I forget which—and his name is Jack. That's all I know about him." Though, by the way she lifted her saucy chin and curled her lip, Christine opined that she knew a great deal more.

"Mr. Jack Forrester? I know him a little. So he is *your* nephew? I never thought of asking if he were related to you. He is a very nice boy," said Christine, with a smile, "and I am glad you have come to see him."

The General gave her a quick look, as if he fancied that something underlay the more obvious meaning of her speech; but Christine did not explain. What she really thought was that Jack Forrester would now be delivered out of the clutches of the two women on whom he had lately been dancing attendance, and she was glad of it.

Rooms were quickly secured for the new-comers, and when Christine was shut in with her sister, she obtained a fuller account of the reasons for his sudden appearance at Cairo.

"Uncle Roderick is a dear," Nelly began, as she removed her hat and opened her dressing-bag. "Of course we should never have dreamed of coming so far but for him. He turned up quite unexpectedly at our hotel in Cannes one day, and at once attached himself devotedly to our service. You know he is a connection by mar-

riage, he was always very fond of poor papa, and of Uncle Oliver too, by the bye—though it seems odd for anybody to be fond of them both, doesn't it? And so, before long, we told him all about ourselves and about *you*."

"There was not very much to tell about me, I think."

"Indeed there was. Uncle Roderick says you must be the pluckiest girl that ever lived, to stay here and work after expecting to spend a pleasant winter in Colonel Lingard's house and being his heiress. He thinks a great deal of you, I can tell you."

"There was no likelihood of my being Colonel Lingard's heiress, when he had a son living," said Christine quietly.

Nelly uttered a sound of scorn which was extremely like a snort. "His son living, indeed, as if we believe that he is Uncle Oliver's son. The General knew Uncle Oliver quite well, and says that he does not believe a word of it. And that was chiefly the reason why he came. He said there ought to be a man on the spot to inquire into all the affairs, and he had his yacht ready, and would it not be better to come straight away. So we came—as his guests, you know."

"As his guests? I am rather surprised, you know, Nell—though pleased as well."

"Of course: we knew you would be surprised. The fact is, mother is quite under the General's thumb, and very good it is for her, too. She believes all he tells her: so when he said, 'Pack up and come to Cairo with me, and we will put this business straight,' she did exactly what she was bid."

"I am afraid there is no chance of putting things straight in his sense of the word," said Christine, thoughtfully, "but it is charming to see you here, Nell, all the same."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ADOPTION OF A COUSIN.

"BUT if you have adopted my uncle, you must adopt me, too, you know," quoth Jack Forrester.

"As an uncle?" asked Nelly Lingard, with an innocent air.

"No, certainly not as an uncle,"—rather hotly. "As a cousin, of course."

"I couldn't think of such a thing," Nelly replied.

They were standing beside an obelisk, not unlike "Cleopatra's Needle," which stood on the site of the ancient city of Heliopolis or Dor. A little stream, flowing through the sand, kept the vegetation brilliantly green about it. The sky was brilliantly blue, the graceful fronds of the palm-trees waved above their heads; the wild bees hummed as they flew in and out of the holes which for ages past they have bored for themselves in the hieroglyphics on the pillar of stone. A dragoman stood by, explaining and emphasizing his explanations in the intervals of keeping back a crowd of beggars and children who clamored for "backshish" from the English travellers. And the two young people, hardly more than boy and girl, stood in front of the slender column on which the eyes of Hebrew patriarch and Egyptian Pharaoh had rested in ages past, and thought themselves and their concerns vastly more interesting than any pointed obelisk of granite with mysterious emblems of bird and beast carved thereon, or the history of those vanished centuries through which it had stood unchanging and unworn.

Nelly was looking very pretty. The past few months had changed her from an awkward girl into a particularly graceful young woman, with lovely dark eyes, and the sweetest smile in the world. There was a touch of archness, almost of sauciness in her expression, which Jack Forrester found especially charming. It was quite unlike Daisy Touchwood's audacity, or Mrs. Vibert's society-smartness, and yet it was interesting and amusing in the highest degree. He could not imagine himself growing tired of Miss Eleanor Lingard's society, although he often found himself "bored" by a course of interviews with the ordinary modern girl. Helen Lingard was not fast: she did not talk slang, and she seemed (to him) unusually clever and intellectual; but there was, on the other hand, nothing "slow" or stupid about her, and she could ride and play lawn tennis exceptionally well. Altogether he considered her a remarkable girl, and was anxious to be on good terms with her.

The party had driven out to the site of Heliopolis in two carriages, one of which conveyed the General and Mrs. Lingard, and one the three young people. The latter had arrived first, however; and Christine had walked back to the main road, from which the track leading to the obelisk branched off, in order to see whether the elderly folks were approaching. Nell and Jack Forrester were left alone, and, after the fashion of young people, remained absorbed in their own affairs to the exclusion of all the antiquities in the world.

"Why couldn't you think of me as a cousin?" inquired Jack, in a disappointed tone, after a pause of some seconds in duration.

"Oh, I don't know. I never had a cousin like you," said Nell, demurely, but with an unmistakable little accent of scorn, which sent a thrill of horror down Jack's spine.

"You *have* cousins then?" he said. His voice was rather husky in spite of himself.

"Oh, yes, I have cousins," said Nell, airily, "but they are nice respectable sort of men that one can trust and believe in. One of them is a clergyman, like my brother-in-law."

"Do you mean that you don't believe in anything but parsons?"

"No, I believe in the General," said Nelly, with the quick flash of a passing smile, "and he's a soldier."

"I'm afraid—for some reason or other—you don't think very well of me, Miss Lingard," said Jack, looking at her. He was prepared for a contradiction, or laughing retaliation, but he was not prepared to see her suddenly flush crimson and turn away without a word. She became absorbed in the hieroglyphics on the column, and began putting questions to the guide, while Jack Forrester, waking to the fact that she really did think ill of him "for some reason or other," stood motionless, with bent brows and flushing cheeks.

"May I ask what I have done to offend you?" was his next question, jerked out in her ear at the very moment when the guide, all smiles and affability, was pointing out the wild bees' holes in the hieroglyphics.

"Nothing—nothing. How could you offend me? I scarcely know you," said Nell. "I did not mean anything, I assure you, Mr. Forrester."

But her eyes were frightened and her cheeks crimson: she had committed an indiscretion, and she knew it.

"You have heard something against me?" said Jack, hitting by accident on something very near the truth.

Nell was candid by nature, and found herself accordingly in a dilemma. "I did not mean to say what I did—please don't think of it again: I am very sorry," she said, in a tone of distress.

"I hope you will tell me what you have heard," said Jack, in a repressed tone which rather alarmed the girl—it savored so much of a manly determination to know the truth.

"Oh, no, no, I really couldn't," she said, thereby confessing in her agitation of mind that she had heard something. "You must not ask me : indeed it was nothing much."

"Has the General——" began Jack, looking very black ; but she cut him short in a moment.

"The General adores you, and you know he does ; he never says a single word to your discredit."

"Somebody else seems to have done so, at any rate," muttered Jack.

It was a very pretty quarrel. They had known each other for some three days at least, and they had reached the quarrelling stage. As a matter of fact, Nell liked Mr. Forrester very much indeed, but thought she did not. She had yet to learn that hot indignation is not incompatible with liking.

At that moment, Christine returned with the rest of the party, and the *tête-à-tête* came to an end, much to Nell's relief. She thought the matter would drop, and that she should hear no more of it ; but she had not calculated on the persistency of Jack's disposition, nor the strength of his interest in herself. She kept close to Christine's side for the rest of the afternoon, and made one or two timid attempts to conciliate the young man, whom it was evident that she had bitterly offended. But Jack would not respond, except in the most perfunctory way : he meant to have it out with her before very long.

It was rather difficult to have it out with Nelly, when she wanted of all things to avoid an explanation. Jack had duties to perform : he could not always be running in and out of Shephard's Hotel, though he did his best to

live there night and day. Mrs. Vibert and Daisy were much piqued by his devotion to the Lingards and his neglect of them. Like so many of the young men who paid them attentions, he was quite ready to throw them over as soon as people of his own "set" or clique came on the scene; and they had been treated in that way often enough to be used to it. But they were angry, nevertheless; for Jack Forrester was lavish with his money, and did not mind losing it at poker or treating them to ices and bon-bons. But now that the Lingards and his uncle Roderick were there, he systematically kept out of Evelyn Vibert's way.

Well, Daisy had Gilbert Greville to look after her; and Mrs. Vibert surely did not need a subaltern's attention when she had a husband of her own, and a particular friend in the person of Mr. Florian Lingard, with whom she was seen everywhere. Mr. Florian Lingard had paid his respects to "his aunt" as he called her, but was received by Mrs. Lingard with very cold and distant civility, while Nell turned her back upon him and refused to acknowledge the relationship. General Forrester and Florian had not yet met, as Mr. Lingard chose to stay at the Continental Hotel and not at Shepheard's. The Continental was so much more amusing than Shepheard's: there were balls for the guests given by the well-known manager, Luigi, nearly every Saturday night, and Mr. Lingard professed to love dancing. It did not occur to anybody that he wanted to keep out of his relations' way: perhaps, also, out of the way of General Forrester. It would have been wiser for him, he sometimes thought, to have left Cairo as soon as the Lingard party appeared; but he had a reason for staying—a special reason, and he would sacrifice a good deal for that. Some people might have conjectured that "the special reason" meant—Evelyn Vibert.

Perseverance was finally crowned with success. Mr. Forrester found Nell alone one day, sitting on the veranda, and at once established himself at her side—blessing, meanwhile, the climate of a country which made seats in the open air customary and pleasant. Nell was still a little afraid of him, but after a few sentences of talk, during which Jack showed himself friendly and no longer in an offended mood, she recovered her courage and began speaking of the many wonderful sights that she had seen. It seemed that she had visited some celebrated buildings that morning, and she was full of the glories of the Sultan Hassan Mosque.

“It was almost like a cathedral,” she was saying: “such wide, echoing corridors and high roofs and steep stone steps. A little rain had just fallen and wetted the pavement of the open court, and made all the colored stones of the pavement gleam and shine! and the blue sky above the great arches, and the white doves flying in and out——”

“Yes, it’s very nice, I know,” said Jack absently—what did he care about mosques, so long as this beautiful young lady held an unfavorable opinion of his merits?—“but, Miss Lingard, if you would only allow me—there is a question I should like so much to ask you?”

“I’m afraid I haven’t time for any questions,” said Nelly, growing frightened, and standing up. “I promised to wake mother in time for tea, and——”

“It isn’t nearly time for tea, and you know it,” said Jack, a little bitterly. “Why, didn’t you say that you had come here to watch the Khedive drive by? He comes about three, and I know he has not passed yet. I’m afraid”—pathetically—“it is only because you don’t like me that you won’t give me the chance to speak.”

Nell’s face became a beautiful shell-pink; she hesitated, looked down and then seated herself again. “It isn’t that,” she said, in a very small voice.

"Well, I want to know what it is," said Jack, resolutely. "What is it that you have heard against me that makes you unfriendly?"

"I am not unfriendly."

"You can't say that you have not been prejudiced against me in some way! It is only fair to tell me: only fair to give me a chance of justifying myself."

"But it is no concern of mine," said Nell, proudly. "I do not mind what people say. I never meant——"

"You never meant to let me know: I understand that. But you *have* let me know, you see; and now you ought to tell me. It is really very painful to me to know that you think so ill of me."

Who would have thought that Jack Forrester's voice could sink so softly, or take so tender an intonation! It had its effect on Nell.

"If you will promise not to ask who told me," she said, looking up at him, "I will tell you. But I am so afraid you will be angry. And it was only gossip, of course."

"I won't be angry; I won't ask who told you; I won't do anything you don't like," said Jack. And he fervently wished that he might say, "My darling," by way of reassurance.

"Well," said the girl, softly, "I heard that you had been very wild and extravagant and given a great deal of trouble to your friends. And that was why General Forrester had come out to Cairo: and that he had had to settle things for you, and that it had distressed him very much—and inconvenienced him too. And I felt so grieved for dear Uncle Roderick, as we call him, for he seemed much too nice and good to be bothered in that way. That was what I heard—but I never meant to say anything, and I am sorry," said Nell, with flaming cheeks and eyes fixed on the ground.

She would have seen Jack's eyes flash and his brow

grow black if she had looked up during her little speech ; but as she never once raised her eyes she was unconscious of his passing irritation, and only noticed the gentleness of his tone as he replied :

"I am awfully glad you told me. It is a lie—at least the worst part of it is a lie. I have been extravagant—I suppose : I have betted pretty freely, and played high now and then ; but I don't believe I ever made my family anxious about me one bit, and certainly I never gave the General any trouble. Dear old boy, I wouldn't do it for the world. You can ask him if you like."

"Oh no, no ! Of course I need not do that !"

"You mean you believe me ? I swear to you that what I have said is true. I am in no difficulties, and I never did anything dishonorable in my life. You don't doubt my word ?"

"No, indeed. I am so glad I asked you. I did not think it would be like you, but then I don't know—and I have scarcely even seen anything of young men," said Nell, with an innocent frankness that took Jack's heart by storm. "Will you forgive me ?"

"Forgiving is not necessary," said Jack, with a laugh. "Only I shall try to do all I can to make you forget. Why, what's the matter ? Look at the General ! Is he going into a fit ?"

And Jack sprang to his feet.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A RECOGNITION.

NELLY very much startled by Jack's exclamation, looked at once in the direction indicated. She saw that the General had just come out of the hotel, with Christine at

his side, and that they were confronted by the figure of Mr. Florian Lingard, who was walking up to the door. At a few yards' distance, Mrs. Vibert and Daisy, seated at a small table, were eagerly observing the scene. They were elaborately dressed, and, as Nelly knew, had planned an excursion for the afternoon in company with Mr. Lingard and one of the young officers. Mr. Lingard had evidently arrived for the purpose, and was about to join them when the General issued from the door.

The old man's face was almost purple with anger: his head was held stiffly erect, his white mustache and whiskers seemed to bristle with indignation. He had made a gesture with his cane—it was this movement that had excited Jack's attention. He knew that his uncle was hot-tempered, and he did not want to see him involved in "a row" on the balcony of Shepheard's Hotel. Not that Florian looked as if there was much fight in him. He had grown pale: his limbs seemed to be shaking, and he had the slinking look of a beaten cur.

"What can it be? Oh, let us go and see," said Nell in an awe-stricken voice. She followed Jack timidly, as he strode up to his uncle's side. Fortunately it was an hour when the balcony was comparatively empty. Besides the persons mentioned, there were only one or two loungers to hear the General's angry words.

"You! *You*, the son of my old friend Oliver Lingard?" the old man was saying with contemptuous anger. "You, the little starving rat that he picked out of the gutter at Constantinople and sent to school out of charity! Why, bless my soul, Christine, you don't mean to tell me that this rascal has had the audacity to pass himself off for your uncle's son and heir?"

"You are mistaken—terribly mistaken," said the young man, though his hands trembled and his lips were ashy pale. "You do not know me, sir; you never saw me in

all your life before. I have all the papers : what I tell you can be proved."

"Had we not better go into a private room to discuss this matter, Uncle Roderick?" said Christine. She telegraphed to Jack Forrester with her eyes for help, and Jack responded instantly.

"Let's come inside, sir. We can talk it out there. Every one is listening out here. This—this gentleman"—Jack brought out the word with an effort—"can then explain to us what we want to know."

Jack's own belief was that his uncle was mistaken in Florian's identity, and that there might be a very ugly scandal, a case of libel and assault and what not, if he were not quieted speedily. He also expected Florian to behave as an honorable Englishman would do under similar circumstances, to court the fullest inquiry, and to behave with a certain amount of dignity in a trying situation.

But Florian did the very worst thing for himself that he could have done. He attempted to escape. He made a sudden bolt for the steps, and when Jack at once laid strong, detaining hands upon his arm, he struggled and kicked and fought. The hotel servants and the loafers about the steps came running up; and there seemed every prospect of the scandalous scene which Jack had anticipated with horror.

But when the General saw Florian's alarm and excitement, he himself became perfectly calm. The color in his face toned down : an ironical smile made itself visible on his lips. "He's afraid, don't you see?" he remarked to Christine. "He can't face me : he wants to run away. Bring him up to my sitting-room : then we will consider whether or no we should send for the police. Out of the way, men : we don't want any of you."

The last remark was addressed to the servants, who

were anxiously interposing to prevent a disturbance ; but as he turned to speak to them he came face to face with Mrs. Vibert, who had walked from her seat to his side.

"How can you behave so disgracefully—so rudely," she said, in a voice that trembled with agitation, "to a man who has done nobody any harm ? It was not his fault that he was Colonel Lingard's son !"

"Colonel Lingard's son !" ejaculated the General with scorn, but then he became silent, and looked seriously at the woman who had addressed him.

It was curious to see her—exquisitely dressed, gloved, bonneted, tightly laced, redolent of delicate perfumes, presenting in every outward point the aspect of a woman of the world, yet white as death save for two hectic spots of hot color on either cheek, with strained dilated eyes and parted lips—championing the cause of a man whom every one else felt at that moment to be a coward and a cur. There was something unnatural and disagreeable about it which kept the onlookers silent for a moment. Then Florian, who had ceased to struggle while she spoke, broke out with a wild cry of appeal.

"Madame, I call on you to witness. Have I not been roughly handled by these men ? insulted ? maltreated ? And for no cause—you can bear me witness—for no cause !"

"Let him go, Jack Forrester !" cried Evelyn, impetuously. "Let him go this moment, or you are a brute ! General Forrester, you are a gentleman and a soldier, why do you treat another gentleman in this way ?"

It was a puzzling situation. The General looked at the lady, then took off his hat and made a solemn, sweeping bow.

"I very much regret, Mrs. Vibert," he said, "that you *should* have been a witness of such an unpleasant scene. I

must confess that I lost my temper, and I apologize to you, and to the other ladies who are present."

"Let him go, then!" said Evelyn, in her most imperious tones. "Do you not hear, Mr. Forrester? Let go his arm. Your uncle has apologized."

Jack looked at his uncle for orders, and did not relax his hold.

"It grieves me very much to refuse a lady's request," said the General, in his sweetest tones. "But ladies are not always the best judges of what is right in cases of this kind. We are not using violence, we simply request the—ah—this *gentleman*—to go with us and answer one or two questions. If he refuses, he condemns himself."

Evelyn glanced at Florian, with a puzzled, yet entreating look. Her face had lost all its color, and her hands had dropped to her sides. "You will go with them? you will answer their questions?" she cried impulsively; then, in a lower, wilder tone, "for my sake!"

Perhaps she thought nobody could hear her save Florian himself. But the words were as distinct as if they had been shouted from the house-tops. There was a queer little sensation, a little shiver of dismay amongst those who heard her. She did not know how much emotion she revealed.

Daisy clutched her by the sleeve: the girl's face was on fire, and lighted by an anger and a scorn which nobody understood. "Do come away, Evelyn," she whispered, sharply. "It's no business of *yours*."

"No, it is no business of yours, my dear lady," said the General, smoothly, "and I think we can settle it indoors better than out here upon the balcony. I will trouble you, sir, to step this way."

Evelyn's remonstrance had produced part of the effect she desired, at least. Jack's hold upon Florian's shoulder had loosened, but he still stood so that the suspected

man could not escape. Florian, thus released, made Evelyn a polite bow, though he was as white as ever and shaking in every limb.

"I cannot express my obligations to Mrs. Vibert," he said, with an attempt at his wonted gallantry of manner, "but I assure you I shall remember it to the end of my life——"

"Bring him in," said the General in an impatient undertone to Jack. "Don't let him stay here talking to an English lady. I know him of old."

"Come along, will you?" said Jack to his prisoner. "You can talk to Mrs. Vibert afterwards, you know. The General is waiting for you now."

Florian shrugged his shoulders, spread out his hands with a slightly theatrical gesture, and followed Forrester into the hotel. At a word from the General, Christine also followed, but Nell was bidden to stay outside. She saw, therefore, as none of the others saw, the burst of feeling which Evelyn Vibert displayed when Florian disappeared. The foolish young woman made a dash forward as if to detain him, then turned white and burst into tears. Nell heard Daisy remonstrating sharply, saw her dragging her sister back and almost forcing her into a low wicker chair with her back to the other occupants of the balcony.

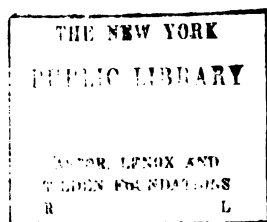
"Everybody will be talking about you; what will people say? What will Gervase say?" said the younger sister. "How can you be such a fool?"

Meanwhile the two Forresters, uncle and nephew, with Christine beside them, stood face to face with Florian in the General's private sitting-room. It was Florian who, recovering his self-possession, spoke first.

"I should like to know why I have been brought here in this extraordinary manner. I shall complain to Baring. I am sure he will protect me. I did not resist, on account

THE MAJOR IN PARTICULAR WAS FURIOUS.





of the presence of ladies, but now I demand to know the reason of this unprovoked attack."

"Oh, by all means," said the General, dryly. "Complain to anybody you please. I have already sent for a friend or two of mine, before whom you can make your statements; one is Captain Greville, whom I think you know already, and the other is Mr. Justice Gray, who can advise me as to the best course to take."

Christine and Jack exchanged doubtful glances; they were still not at all sure whether the General were not making some great mistake. But for Florian's intense and unmistakable anguish of fear and dismay, they would have been ready to let him slip out of the General's clutches at any moment. But the man's face convicted him of something—they scarcely knew of what.

"I do not know what you wish to say to me," he muttered, casting anxious eyes round the room, as if to seek a way of escape.

"I wish to say," observed the General, forcibly, "that you are an impostor and a thief, sir. I know all about you and your origin: you are Luigi Floriani, a young Italian scamp whom Oliver Lingard fed and clothed and educated for a mere whim—partly, as he told me, because you happened to be called Floriani, and his little son who died at Chios bore the name of Florian."

"He *was* married, then?" asked Christine.

"Yes, he was married, but his wife and child died. He made a pet of this boy, whose face I recognize perfectly, and meant to provide for him. And you mean to tell me that this scoundrel has been persuading you all this time that he was Lingard's son? There must have been some fine false swearing, somewhere or other."

"It is false—it is a mistake," said the accused man, trembling violently, but speaking with sullen energy;

"you cannot prove your words, and you shall answer for them in a court of justice, General Forrester."

"Don't talk to me about a court of justice, sir," said General Forrester in his sharpest tones. "Have I not seen you in one myself? What about that theft of your master's money in Constantinople five years ago, eh? I wonder Colonel Lingard ever took you into his house again; but he did, and this is the reward he gets. We shall have no trouble in convicting you, I think. Why, my own man would know you anywhere. Don't you remember my man, Jenkinson?"

Florian spread out his fingers. "If he is here, I am lost," he muttered, hoarsely. Then suddenly he sank on his knees and lifted his clasped hands to Christine Lingard.

"Mademoiselle, you were always kind and generous. For heaven's sake let me go. I will make a full confession; I will pay back everything. It is true—it is true what the General says—I am an impostor—but the temptation was so great! It seemed so easy. And I did what I could to repair any injustice: I asked this lady to become my wife—I would have given her anything if she would only have bestowed her hand on me!"

"Is that true, Christine," said the General. And Christine answered that it was true.

"And indeed, uncle," she added in a lower tone, "don't you think we could settle the affair quietly? If he confesses and restores everything, could we not let him go away free? I am sure we do not want to punish him."

"So like a woman," growled the General. "No, my dear, I don't see my way to compounding a felony, for that wretched fellow's sake. No, the matter must be made plain, and I don't see how that can be done without a prosecution. And here comes Greville and Mr. Gray, and I'll have the fellow whisked off to prison if I can,

without a moment's hesitation. He has confessed : there is no question as to his guilt; and to prison he shall go."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MYSTERY.

BUT it was not quite so easy to clap Florian Lingard into prison as General Forrester imagined. To begin with, as soon as ever Mr. Justice Gray and Captain Greville made their appearance, he took back every word that he had said by way of confession. It was very plain that the only chance of obtaining a statement of the facts from him was by giving a promise not to prosecute. And as the evidence against him was not sufficient to warrant his detention, he was liberated, though, as the General, breathing fire and flame, remarked, he was simply being allowed to escape scot-free, for of course he would never show his face again. If the accusation against him were to be proved, the General would have to produce certain letters written by Colonel Lingard respecting his early marriage, and as these were not yet forthcoming, it was represented to him very strongly that Florian could not be detained in custody. "He would be detained in England," said the General, angrily. And his friends replied—"Possibly, but not in Egypt."

It was one of those cases in which the formalities of the law seem designed to assist the escape of the criminal. As the General anticipated, Florian made plans for leaving Cairo immediately. There was a boat leaving Ismailia on the following day : he meant to slip away by the night-train, and get to a safe distance before the case was clear enough against him to allow of a warrant for his

arrest. After all, he argued, when he had recovered his nerve, the declaration of one old gentleman that he had seen him under another name in Constantinople, did not prove anything against him. He had been declared Colonel Lingard's son by the law, and had taken possession of the property. There was nothing *yet* to arrest him for. He had been a fool to hope to earn anything by a confession. Fortunately, it had not been quite too late for him to withdraw and repudiate what he had said when he fell on his knees to Christine and General Forrester. He would make his escape while yet there was time; for it was possible after all, that the old man could prove his case, and make him hand the property over to the Lingard family. Meanwhile, had he a friend on whom he could rely? a friend who would take care of some rather compromising papers for him, and who would not be unwilling to increase his store of ready money? He was afraid to go to Alexandria for more funds: he wanted to get out of Egypt as soon as possible. The only person of whom he could think was Mrs. Vibert.

Gervase Vibert had gone to Helouan for a day or two. He thought that the dryness and heat of that place would be good for him, and he had no scruples about leaving his wife and sister-in-law alone. "They would be well looked after," he said to himself with grim satire, as he thought of the young officials and "army men" who haunted their vicinity. But it would have been well for him at that time if he had stayed behind.

Mrs. Vibert and her sister remained on the balcony until General Forrester's visitors left him. Florian was the first to depart. He came out alone, casting suspicious glances from right to left, as if he thought that someone might be lying in wait for him, yet not seeming to recognize the presence of the two women he knew. Afterwards he remembered that he had seen them there. Just

then he was too much absorbed in his own thoughts to take any notice of them. His face was white and fierce : his eyes glittered with an unholy fire. Evelyn Vibert started up when she saw him, and would have called his name, but Daisy pulled her back.

"Be quiet, Evelyn ! You ought to be ashamed. Don't you see that he has been found out ? He has been a thief and an impostor all the time, and Gilbert was perfectly right."

Evelyn sank back in her seat, sullen and defiant. "It is a plot got up by the old man for the sake of the Lingards," she hissed out, in a tone which even Daisy had never heard before. "How will you like it when that girl Christine gets all the money ? You won't keep your Gilbert then, you know : he would throw you over on the slightest pretext. It is a wicked plot against Florian Lingard."

"If it is, I don't see that it is any business of yours," said Daisy, with sharpness. "Why should you mind what that man has done or has not done ? He is nothing to you. Come upstairs and lie down : everybody is looking at you."

"I am not coming upstairs : I am going out," said Evelyn, looking fixedly before her.

"You are *not* !" cried Daisy keenly. "I won't have it. I'll telegraph to Gervase if you do. You will stay with me."

The sisters looked at one another. Daisy's little face was flushed with determination. Evelyn was extremely pale, but there was a strange light, an evil light, in those beautiful hazel eyes of hers. They seemed to threaten the girl who stood and looked at her.

"If you interfere with me now," said Mrs. Vibert, in a hard low tone, "you will rue it all your life. I am not going to be controlled by a child like you."

Daisy shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not controlling you: I'm only advising you for your good," she said. "Come upstairs and rest, or go for a drive with me: it will look bad if you go out alone."

Evelyn yielded, and went upstairs; and Daisy went with her, at some sacrifice to herself, for she was secretly wishing to see Gilbert when he came out, and was angry at his having been summoned to the secret conclave. But as usual she gave up her own wishes for Evelyn's sake. Alone she could be very selfish; but she was not selfish where Evelyn was concerned.

She waited on her sister through the inevitable burst of hysterical crying that followed on this scene, administered eau-de-Cologne and sal-volatile, and alternately coaxed and scolded until Evelyn became calm and seemed inclined to sleep. Then she slipped away and descended to the balcony, where, as she had hoped, she found Captain Greville waiting for her.

She was glad, but the gladness was succeeded by a throb of pain. He was talking to Christine—talking as he never talked to Daisy, in low, earnest tones: looking (so Daisy thought) as he never looked at *her*. The sight deprived her of all wish to be confidential with him. She had come down, intending to tell him all about Evelyn; but now she felt as if she did not care to say a word. She seated herself wearily in a chair at some little distance from Captain Greville's, crossed her hands on her lap, and looked at the crowded, color-laden street.

Presently he came over to her, as she had expected him to do, but she did not turn her head. She felt him look at her keenly. She did not mind the look: she did not know how white, how limp, how helpless was her appearance at that moment. She was thinking with jealous anger of what Evelyn had said about Gilbert and Christine.

"You seem depressed," he said presently; in rather a dry tone.

"I have a head on," she said, using a bit of slang which she knew he disliked. "I've been rather cheap all day."

"I suppose you are sorry to hear that your friend, Mr. Florian Lingard, as he called himself, is practically convicted of imposture and fraud, and possibly of forgery."

"Yes, I'm very sorry to hear it," said Daisy. The coldness of his tone made her lips tremble; and Gilbert, casting a glance at her, thought that she was on the point of weeping for Florian's fall. He rose instantly.

"I must go: I am due at the Citadel at half-past seven."

"Good-bye then," said Daisy, listlessly. She watched him go down the steps and jump into a passing carriage with rather a sad heart; but before long, she roused herself, for the sound of the bell for dinner recalled her from her abstraction. She went into the dining-room with Christine, for Mrs. Vibert had declared that she could not eat any dinner; and sat patiently through the many courses of the meal, although she did not eat much of what was set before her. After coffee, she went upstairs again to Evelyn's room.

"Are you asleep, Evie?" she said, opening the door.

To her amaze, Evelyn, in hat and cloak, was standing by a chest of drawers, with a jewel-box in her hands. She seemed to be taking out some of the jewels and packing them in a hand-bag. Daisy's heart made a sudden painful leap.

"You have been out?" she said breathlessly.

"What is that to you?" asked Mrs. Vibert.

"Evelyn, it's a great deal to me. Tell me—do tell me—at any rate, that you haven't been to see Mr. Florian Lingard."

"If I had, do you think I should tell you?"

Her voice was cruelly hard and cold. Daisy drew nearer, and looked at the jewel-box and the bag.

"What are you doing with your bracelets?"

"I am going to take them to be cleaned to-morrow."

"Then why not leave them in their box to-night?"

"Daisy you are intolerable. Do you think I want your little schoolgirl proprieties and moralities? Of course I see what you mean. You think I am going to run away with them."

"No, indeed. I should be sorry to think such a thing of you."

"Then you think I mean to put them to some bad use—give them away for something. Well, all I can say is, I won't be dictated to. I shall do as I please with my own property."

"Gervase's property!"

"It is not Gervase's property," with an angry stamp of her foot. "It is my own, for he gave them to me to do as I like with; and I will have no interference."

"If you are only going to use them yourself, it is all right," said Daisy determinedly. "But if you are going to give them away, it is all wrong, and you must not do it."

"Must not! You little fool! I shall do as I choose."

"Evelyn," said the girl, moving a step nearer and looking her sister full in the face, "you know you are not saying what you really believe to be the truth. You know you have no right to give away, or sell, these things that Gervase gave you. It wouldn't be honest—unless it was for his own sake. I don't know anything about the law of it, and I don't care; but I know that Gervase gave you those ornaments to wear for his pleasure: he bought them for you and for nobody else, and you haven't a right to do with them just what you choose."

"Why should you conclude that I want to sell them or give them away? I never said that I did."

"I know, and I hope you won't do it. But I had a sort of feeling——Tell me that you didn't, Evie, and I won't bother any more."

"I shall tell you nothing of the kind."

"If you don't promise me that you won't sell them or give them away, I will telegraph to Gervase to come back at once," said Daisy, with a sharpness born of desperation.

Evelyn turned on her with a violent gesture, almost as though she would have struck her in the face, but Daisy did not flinch. And finding herself thus braved and confronted, Evelyn's hand and eyelids sank, she was mastered, she knew, by the little frivolous girl whose interest in life seemed hitherto to have lain in dancing and flirtation.

"You are extremely absurd," said Mrs. Vibert, with a contemptuous intonation, after a silence which Daisy felt terribly hard to bear. "Of course I have no intention of giving away or selling any of the things Gervase has given me; only I did not know that you required to be told so. I am going to have them cleaned, as I said before. I don't know what has become of you to-night: you are utterly ridiculous and tiresome. I can see what you will be in a few years if you don't alter—a regular old frump of the dowdiest kind. I hope Captain Greville will like it. I wish you would leave me in peace, at any rate. I was just going to bed when you burst in upon me."

"Are you going to bed? Oh, I am glad of that," said Daisy, in a tone of relief. "I did not mean to be tiresome, Evie," she added, holding up her face to be kissed.

Mrs. Vibert put her lips coldly to the soft cheek and then turned away. "Don't bother," she said. "I don't want anything else, so I'll say good-night."

"Shall I bring you some biscuits or wine?"

"Nothing, thanks. Good-night. You needn't come in again: I'm tired and shall be asleep."

Daisy crept away, sore and shaken in spirit, but re-

lieved in mind. Evelyn had set all her vague suspicions to rest, and she forgot until afterwards that she had received no explanation of the expedition which Mrs. Vibert had evidently undertaken while dinner was in progress. Daisy resolved to ask her about it on the morrow.

Meanwhile, she was not inclined to sleep. She was tired and restless, and the night was warm. She put on a light dressing-gown and tried to read a novel. But every now and then it seemed to her that she heard mysterious sounds in Evelyn's room, or in the corridor. Once she looked out, but the corridor was dark and still, and Evelyn's door was shut.

She was almost dozing at last over her book, when something roused her—she knew not what. She had heard a door open, she thought: was it her own? No, her own was shut.

Without thinking what she was doing, Daisy made a rush for the passage. Evelyn's door was next to hers. But it stood wide open, and the room was empty.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

MR. HOSKINS was suffering severely from the non-success of his love affair, if such it may be called. He had taken a room at Shepheard's, in order that he might have the inestimable advantage of looking at Miss Daisy Touchwood at luncheon and dinner, to the great detriment of his meals; but he had made no advance in her favor. She had spoken to him once or twice in a friendly fashion enough, and he knew that she had forgotten or forgiven his indiscretion on board the steamer; but she took no

further notice of him, and he felt himself absolutely unimportant in her sight. He was beginning to think with discouragement of any further stay in Cairo, and to plan a trip to Syria before returning to his native land. In the sight of Jerusalem, in a visit to Nazareth and Bethany, he might forget the distractions of an earthly love. And his congregation would expect it of him too: they were already looking forward, he had been informed, to a series of lectures which he was expected to deliver in "the fall," on "Egypt and Palestine, by one who has visited them." Yes, it was full time for him to go. He had been up the river a little way; and had come back to Cairo with the full intention of taking a Cook's tourist ticket to the Holy Land. If he had not found the Viberts and Daisy at Shepheard's Hotel, he would not have lingered, wasting time and money in a prolonged sojourn at Cairo. He was telling himself this—trying to impress upon himself the necessity for immediate departure as he walked along the street which led from the great Esbekeeyah Square to Shepheard's. He had been—unwonted dissipation!—dining with a friend at the Continental, and was coming home between ten and eleven o'clock at night, when, to his great astonishment, his arm was seized by a girl's slender hand, and a pair of blue eyes that he knew only too well gazing appealingly into his face.

"Oh, Mr. Hoskins, you will help me, won't you? I know I can trust you!" were the words that broke, with a sob, from Daisy's lips. It was so unexpected an appeal that Hoskins for one moment fancied that she must be, as he expressed it, "making game" of him; but a glance into her pale, tear-stained countenance told him that this was no jest. Daisy did not even know that she was crying: she was intensely anxious and agitated, and not very well aware of what she said or did.

"Of—of course you can, Miss Daisy! I would do any-

thing for you," stammered Hoskins confusedly. "What is it?"

"I don't know—I mean I can't tell yet, but I'm afraid," cried the girl, the tears running over from her limpid blue eyes. Unobservant as Nathaniel usually was, he could not help noticing that she wore a plain morning frock, with a cloak thrown over it, and a black lace scarf over her head. She looked as if she had caught up whatever was nearest to her hand, thrown them on, and run out into the road.

"What are you afraid of? Has anybody been hurting or insulting you? If they have, I'll knock them down," said the young minister, clenching his white fist, and looking suddenly warlike. "Tell me who it is, and I'll soon make him hear reason. Is it your brother-in-law—or Captain Greville?"

"Oh, it's nothing of that sort: it's something real," cried the girl. "As if I should run out here because anyone was unkind to me! I should hope I knew how to take my own part better than that! No, it's Evelyn, my sister—I don't know where she is, and Gervase is away—ah, do help me to find her."

"Of course we shall find her," said Mr. Hoskins, comfortably: he did not think there was very much amiss. "Did she go out? She may have got back by now: we had better go to the hotel and ask."

Daisy gave his arm a sharp pinch in her excitement.

"How silly you are!" she exclaimed. "Don't you see what I mean? She's gone away—run away, I believe, and I want to bring her back. What shall I do!"

Mr. Hoskins recoiled in dismay. "Surely you must be mistaken!" he said; and there was horror in his voice.

"I am not mistaken in the least," said Daisy, with more firmness. "Walk on with me and I will tell you all I know. You don't mind helping me? I thought you

would not. I want to go to the Continental and inquire for Mr. Florian Lingard."

They walked thither, and as they went, Daisy told the history of her suspicions, in low and broken tones. Nathaniel Hoskins was not well versed in the ways of the world—very little versed indeed in the ways of women; but even he saw that Mrs. Vibert's conduct had been strange and compromising. Not having seen her with Florian, however, he was inclined to think that Daisy was a trifle over suspicious: he did not know Evelyn's character and inclinations as Daisy did. But it was a pleasure to him to feel himself Daisy's helper, though he wondered a little, in a vague way at her readiness to confide in him.

"Did you—did you—send word to Captain Greville?" he asked at length, rather hoarsely.

"No: certainly not."

"Should you not have done so? Would it not have been better?"

"No," said Daisy curtly. Then, as if feeling that the sharp monosyllable required explanation, she went on more slowly,

"Captain Greville would be hard on Evelyn, I know: harder than you would be. I don't want to tell him anything about her unless I need."

"He would not be hard if *you* told him, if *you* asked him——" began Mr. Hoskins breathlessly, and then broke down from excess of emotion.

"Oh, yes, he would," said Daisy, coldly. "You don't know him: you don't understand. Oh, what a long time we are taking on the way! Why didn't you call a carriage?"

The last words were like a cry; and Mr. Hoskins could not understand why she should speak with such a sudden passion of impatience. He did not see that she was not

rendered impatient by him, or by the distance, but by the thought of Greville and his want of sympathy with her. The conviction had of late been forcing itself more and more painfully on the girl that Gilbert did not care for her. Should she give him up for that? she constantly asked herself. Surely she could *make* him love her by and by! But Hoskins' assumption that Greville was the proper person to be told of her troubles smote her hard. She had an instinctive knowledge of Gilbert's attitude towards her, and she shrank from making it too evident—even to herself.

They reached the imposing pile of buildings known as the Continental Hotel, where Florian had been staying; and there, in obedience to Daisy's behests, Hoskins went in and made certain inquiries.

Mr. Florian Lingard had left that evening—only a few minutes earlier, in fact—in order to take the night-train to Alexandria. "Monsieur would remember," said the polite manager, "that to-day was Wednesday, and that a steamer left Alexandria for Beyrout on the following day. He thought that Mr. Florian Lingard meant to go to Syria."

"Was he going alone?" Mr. Hoskins ventured to ask.

Certainly, as far as the manager knew. He might be accompanied by friends: there was no saying. Had any one been to call on him that night? Well, yes: a lady—a veiled lady, in a cloak—had visited him. The manager had not seen her; but he had heard from a servant that she was a tall lady, slender and graceful. And that was all he knew.

Daisy had remained outside while this dialogue was in progress. She had forgotten to put on a veil, and did not want to be seen by the hotel-people, or the guests who might be passing in and out. She had forgotten one danger, however. There was no balcony in front of the

Continental, where she might have remained concealed : the doors "gave" directly on the pavement, where she was standing, and the lights fell full on her figure and her face. Of this she was quite unconscious; and then it happened that a brother-officer of Greville's, a man known for his love of ill-natured gossip, passing by at that moment, saw the girl, and even turned back and re-passed her in order to make sure that it was she. The door opened at that moment, and Hoskins, whom Major Lugard did not recognize, returned to her side. The Major was almost certain that he heard the name of Florian Lingard uttered between them as he passed on his way.

"Well, I've heard plenty of stories about that girl," he said to himself with a chuckle, "but I'm blest if I thought she would stand about at hotel-doors inquiring for that cad, Florian Lingard. I wonder what Greville would say to it if he knew, poor old chap! It would be only a kindness to tell him what I've seen with my own eyes."

Poor Daisy, with a recklessness which was at least innocent, never thought of what might be said of her when she stood outside the doors of the Continental, while Mr. Hoskins asked puzzled questions concerning the movements of Mr. Lingard.

"What time does the train leave for Alexandria?" she said, when she had heard his story. "Then we have just time to get to the station. We will see if he is there, and if—Evelyn——"

"Perhaps she has gone to see him off," said Mr. Hoskins, weakly, but with an honest attempt to comfort her.

Daisy flashed a look of withering contempt at him.

"As if she would do anything so silly!" she exclaimed. "No, if *that* were all——" She turned her face away.

"Shall we take a carriage?" asked the young man, timidly.

"Yes, yes—at once, please!" And, a driver being hastily summoned, they soon found themselves being conveyed, at a rattling pace, through the ill-paved and ill-lighted side-streets of Cairo towards the railway station.

There was no moon, but the stars glittered in the blue heaven with all the intensity of brightness which they show in a southern clime, and diffused a soft light through the gloom, by which Hoskins could catch a glimpse from time to time of Daisy's face. It was very pale, very rigid, very unlike itself. He did not dare to speak to her. It was she who broke the silence by saying—

"I have no money. I forgot my purse."

"I have plenty," said the young man, hurriedly. "Don't trouble yourself about that."

"You can pay the driver then," said Daisy. "But—I may want more than that. Can you lend me some? I'll pay you back."

It would be almost impossible to describe the strange dulness and hardness of her face and voice. There was a growing anxiety, a look of sharp pain, about her knitted brows and compressed mouth. It was clear to Hoskins that she was fearing the worst for Evelyn and Evelyn's future.

Fortunately he had gold with him, and not merely the few piastres which were wanted for the driver. He opened his purse, took out five sovereigns, and placed them in her hand. "Is that enough," he said, simply.

"Yes, I think so." Then, with an effort—"I ought to thank you. I'll thank you—afterwards."

"You need not thank me," he said. "You know I'm always ready. I'd do anything for you."

"There's not often anything you can do," said matter-of-fact Daisy, in a quiet tone. "But I'm awfully obliged to you all the same. Very likely"—with a half-hysterical laugh—"I'm making a fool of myself all this time. I

expect to find that Evelyn's safe at home, in bed and asleep, and not at the station at all."

"Yes, yes, I expect that is the case," said Hoskins, soothingly. "Never mind : if she is not here, you will go home again, will you not ? "

"I will go and look," said the girl, with sudden reserve ; and then she said no more until the station was actually reached.

"We have only just time," said Hoskins with sudden dismay, as the carriage stopped. "The train will be off directly. Run into the station, and I'll tell the driver to wait for us."

Daisy did as he directed. He was detained for a minute or two by the driver's difficulty in understanding the few words of Arabic that he could speak : but as soon as he was free, he dashed after the girl, as fast as his legs would carry him. A bell rang as he made his way to the platform. The train was already beginning to move, and the station was almost empty. But to the young man's dismay, he was just in time to witness a scene which caused him the liveliest anxiety.

A girl was forcing her way into a first-class railway carriage, evidently against the will of its occupants, who were trying to push her back. A porter or two were flying to her help : some one was shouting violently, and the train was increasing its speed. Hoskins ran and shouted too ; but all at once it seemed as though the opposition of the persons in the carriage was relaxed ; the girl was drawn inside and the door banged after her. Hoskins stood and gazed with open mouth and staring eyes. Daisy was gone, and he had seen the face of Florian Lingard at the window.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BETWEEN CAIRO AND ALEXANDRIA.

It had been hot all day, and the railway carriages on the line between Cairo and Alexandria were not unlike furnaces while the heat of the sun was on them. Even at eleven o'clock at night they were close and stuffy, and the dust remained upon the seats in thick, unwholesome-looking layers. The carriage into which Daisy Touchwood had half precipitated herself, half been drawn, was occupied already by two persons—a man and a woman ; and the man, as Hoskins had seen, was Florian Lingard—the woman, as Daisy divined, none other than her sister Evelyn. But her face was not to be seen : thickly veiled, and cloaked from head to foot, she was unrecognizable to the ordinary eye. Only by one, perhaps, who loved her could her identity have even been guessed.

For a few moments after the train had started, these three persons, the sole occupants of the carriage, preserved silence. Daisy had almost fallen, when she was dragged inside ; and remained for a minute or two in a half kneeling attitude, clutching at one of the hot velvet-covered seats. Florian stepped to a window and looked out. The veiled woman neither moved nor spoke.

Daisy, who had been panting from her exertion, found voice first.

“ Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn ! ” she cried, stretching her hands out to her sister's lap, “ why did you go ? ”

Evelyn wrenched her skirts from her sister's fingers, and drew back into the furthest corner of the carriage, with

an angry gesture. It was evidently meant to silence Daisy, but the girl did not at first understand why. Indeed at first she did not in the least grasp the fact that she had formed a wrong idea of the situation.

Florian turned back from the window at last. "They have done shouting after us at last," he said, in a savagely polite tone. "And now may I ask, Miss Touchwood, why you chose to imperil your own life—and mine, too, perhaps—by trying to get into a carriage while it was in motion?"

Daisy raised her flushed face to his. "Was it not likely that I should?—when I saw my sister here?"

"Your sister!" Florian laughed scornfully. "And where is your sister, pray? And why——"

He stopped short. A blank look came over his face. The conviction came suddenly to Daisy's mind that he was actually sincere—that there was no concerted plan after all—that possibly he did not even know that Evelyn was in the train. An agony of terror lest she should have done harm and not good took possession of her. She drew herself up by the seat and spoke hurriedly.

"Then I was mistaken," she said. "You must not mind what I said—I fancied—but it was perhaps only fancy——"

"You need not try to eat your words, Daisy." The voice, icy cold, and clear—came from the corner of the carriage where Evelyn had ensconced herself. She put up her hand and took off her veil, showing a countenance which, although white and drawn, seemed absolutely devoid of emotion. She looked ill, but neither angry nor sorry. "You need not contradict yourself. You saw me here. But in one respect you are wrong. Mr. Lingard did not know that I intended to come by this train to-night."

Daisy kept her eyes on Evelyn's face. There was much

to be read in it which she did not understand. Florian broke the silence with a harsh laugh.

"No, by heaven, I didn't know *that*?" he said. And again there was silence.

All at once Evelyn's face changed. It flushed violently. It grew convulsed and twitched as if she were about to cry; but her eyes were not wet, and no sob came from her lips. She turned upon Daisy with a gesture of rage and despair.

"You fool! You little fool," she almost screamed, as if anxious to make herself heard above the bounding roar of the train. "Don't you see what you have done? How can I tell him—now—why I have come?"

"Perhaps it is all the better that you can't," said Daisy, stoutly. But she was trembling in spite of herself, and she shrank back appalled when Evelyn raised her hand and struck her full upon the mouth. Evelyn had often been violent, when once roused from her apathetic self-content, but never before had she turned her violence against her sister. And Daisy forgot to be angry: she was only grieved and frightened. She put up her hand to her mouth, for the blow had hurt her a good deal, and spoke in a trembling voice: "You will come back with me, Evie, and nobody will know."

"*He* knows and *you* know," said Evelyn, dryly. Her passion had evaporated: perhaps the sight of a drop of blood on Daisy's mouth brought her to herself. There had been some heavy rings on Mrs. Vibert's hand, and one of them had cut the girl's upper lip. Evelyn threw herself back in the corner, and looked stormily before her. Again Florian laughed aloud.

"You say *I* know," he remarked. "D——d if I know, as an Englishman would say. What is it all about? What are you quarrelling for? Can't I settle it? Shall I put you both out at Benha station—or only one of you? I

think it must be you, Miss Daisy, if only one of you goes; but I'm not aware that I invited either."

Evelyn turned a white face and gleaming eyes upon him.

"Not aware that you asked me to come with you to-night?" she said. "When I saw you this evening, what did you say?"

"I did the right thing, I hope; I could not well do less," said Florian, with a sneering look and a mocking bow. "When Madame was so kind as to bring me her jewels——"

"Ah! she took them to you!" cried Daisy, involuntarily; but no one seemed to hear.

"—I could not in courtesy refrain from asking her to accompany me on my travels for a week or two—say, as long as the jewels lasted; but Madame said me nay, as I understood her; so that the pleasure of the company was wholly unexpected to-night."

"Can you not understand?" Evelyn broke out impatiently. "I *said* no, but I did not mean it—how could I mean it, when I care for nobody in the world—no one, but yourself! And how could I stay behind when you had taken the things Gervase gave me? What was I to say to him—or to *her*—when I was asked where they were gone? If I had said they were stolen, I should have been told I was the thief! Oh, yes, that girl there, she would have accused me with all her pretence of affection and her fuss about her sister, she would have been the first to say that I had taken what did not belong to me—the little marplot—the little, sneaking spy!"

A burst of hysterical tears came to her relief: she wept fiercely and furiously for a few minutes, and then seemed exhausted and more relieved. Daisy watched her from her corner, her handkerchief pressed to her lips; when she was calmer, the girl bent forward and spoke. A touch of the old defiance had come back to her clear voice.

"You know very well that I never made any *pretence* of affection for you. You know that I always cared for you more than anybody; and yet you call me a marplot and a spy! But you don't mean it, and I don't mean to think of it again. Come back with me to Cairo, and nobody shall know. I promise you that nobody shall know. We will say that we went together——"

"Or that Mrs. Vibert went to take care of *you*," said Florian, coolly. He noticed that there was a sudden flash from Evelyn's tear-dimmed eyes.

"Me?" said Daisy, not understanding. "Me?—Well, just as you like. What you say, Evie, I will say too. Nobody shall blame you at any rate; I'll take care of that."

"You seem very sure that I am going back with you!" said Evelyn, harshly. Then she turned her eyes upon Florian, with a look of appeal—an appeal which would have had a terrible pathos to any one who knew what she asked from him and what she feared. But Florian was not the man to be moved by pathos of any kind.

"Faith!" he said, drawing a cigarette-case from his pocket, "I am in a tremendous dilemma between these two fair ladies, who would tear me to pieces if I would allow them. There is no way out of it but to smoke. Pardon, Madame; you permit me? Perhaps you also will take a cigarette?"

Evelyn waved him off, and hid her face in her hands. The shameless amusement exhibited by this man at the predicament which he himself had helped to bring about, humiliated but did not revolt her. It was Daisy who muttered "Brute!" after her usual reckless fashion, and moved nearer to Evelyn, as if to protect her. Florian lighted a cigar with perfect unconcern; and as he did so, the train slackened pace, and drew up at a station.

"Evelyn, let us get out here!" exclaimed Daisy. "We can wait at the station and go back to Cairo by another train. Do come, dear."

"You can go, if you like," said Evelyn, from behind her hands which she kept pressed over her face. "But I shall not go. I shall never go back."

"And pardon me, Miss Daisy, you would be very uncomfortable at this little wayside station," said Florian, easily. "You had better go on to Alexandria and stay at the Khedivial; then you can telegraph to Cairo for Monsieur, or for the gallant Capitaine. That will be easier in every way."

The two women preserved a dead silence; the train steamed on again, and Florian puffed away at his cigar. At last Evelyn lifted her head, and looked at him in the face.

"Florian!" she said, imploringly.

"Madame?"

He smiled caressingly, and held his lighted cigar between two of his fingers, as he stooped forward to hear what she would say. Daisy never forgot the expression of poignant anguish which crossed her sister's face as she poured her last appeal into this man's ear.

"Florian! I cannot have made a mistake! You said you loved me: you have told me so many times. I can't bear my life any longer. I hate my husband: I never loved him and I loathe him now. Do you know that he makes himself drunk with *haschish*, like the Arabs? I cannot bear to live with him—I would die sooner than go back. You asked me to go away with you:—surely—you don't mean that you were not in earnest—you don't mean to leave me here in Egypt without you? It would be too cruel—it would break my heart!"

"My ever-dear lady," said Florian, lightly, "hearts are not so soon broken as you think. What can I do? You

refused this evening to come with me when I suggested it, and I have therefore made no preparations for this emergency. I am flying from my enemies, as you know: I must not be impeded. Even if I could take you, there is Mademoiselle your sister to be provided for. You could hardly expect me to take her too, *hein?* And it would be sheer cruelty to leave her alone in a strange place. Let me advise, Madame, you return to Cairo to-morrow morning, and say that it was all an accident—a mistake. It is the only course open to you now."

Evelyn gazed at him, stupefied. Was this the man who had poured subtle flatteries and poisonous words of love into her ears from day to day, for the past few weeks. His whole manner had changed: she could hardly recognize him as the same.

"I can have no burden on my shoulders when I fly," continued Florian, imperturbably. "I am much obliged to Madame for her good wishes, and for the substantial tokens of her good-will that I carry away with me; but I could not think, on mature reflection, of asking her to share my miserable fate. Besides, it may interest Madame to learn that all the love I have to give is bestowed upon my charming cousin Christine. Ah, if she would only have consented to fly with me, exile would have been bliss indeed. But for any one else—excuse me, Madame—the outlook would be bad indeed."

He had said enough. Evelyn's head sank until her face was hidden on the cushions of the carriage. Whether she had fainted or not at first could not be ascertained, but when Daisy tried to draw the bowed head on her lap, her sister resisted with a force which showed her to be conscious. Conscious—and suffering, with an intensity which, in her pleasure-loving life, Evelyn Vibert had never suffered before. And thus they made their night journey to Alexandria.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RETURN JOURNEY.

It was early dawn when the terminus was reached. But Florian was no longer in the carriage with the sisters. When the small station of Sidi Gabr, a short distance from Alexandria, was reached, he quietly opened the door and made his exit, with an elaborate flourish of his hat which had a distinctly mocking signification. Neither of the two women showed that they even noticed his departure. Evelyn still lay with her face hidden, and Daisy's hands were busy smoothing and caressing her sister's beautiful disordered hair. But when he was gone, Mrs. Vibert moved and sat up. It was evident that she knew that they were nearing Alexandria. She put up her hands and arranged her bonnet and veil. She looked haggard, but was perfectly calm.

"We are almost there now," said Daisy. "What shall we do?"

"It is your business," Evelyn answered, sullenly. "Manage it yourself. You have meddled with my plans and spoiled them: you can do what you please now."

"Very well," said Daisy, with some of her old sharpness. "Then you must please be bound by what I do. We will go to the Khedivial Hotel and telegraph to Shephard's and to Gilbert. There will be a fine hue and cry if we don't do that."

"As you please," said Evelyn, coldly. "I don't quite see how you mean to explain things, but you can do as you choose. It is really of no interest to me."

Daisy recognized the mood. Evelyn was sulking as she had often done before, but there was something tragic in this form of sulkiness. Nevertheless it seemed better to Daisy than actual violence, for she was not without fear of Evelyn's fiercer moods. This beautiful woman, with the sweet, caressing manner and tender smile, was subject to gusts of passion which almost terrified the younger sister, who, in spite of her brusque ways, was of far gentler mould.

Daisy accepted the leadership. She marshalled Mrs. Vibert into a carriage, she carried her sister's bag, she gave directions to the driver; and in due time they arrived at the Khedivial Hotel, and were shown into rooms communicating with each other. After some little parley with the manager, Daisy came to her sister with a telegraph form in her hand. She found Evelyn sitting on a chair by the window, with her hands clasped in her lap: there was a curious expression of frozen sullen despair upon her now colorless face.

"Evelyn, I should like you to see the telegram I am sending," said Daisy, clearly.

Mrs. Vibert did not look at her: did not hold out her hand. So Daisy read aloud what she had written:

"Called away on business. Shall be back to lunch.

"VIBERT."

That is to Shephard's, you know," she explained. "Then to Gilbert I have telegraphed the same thing. We can easily catch the nine o'clock train and be back before one. Shall I telegraph to—any one else?"

Still without a word, Evelyn held out her hand for the telegram, which Daisy gave to her. "Send this one," she said, giving back the message to the manager at Shephard's. "This one," she went on, clutching more fiercely

the telegram to Captain Greville, "you need not send."

"Why not? I shall telegraph to Gilbert if I choose."

"You said to me," Evelyn responded slowly, "that I should be safe from gossip if I went back. Well, keep your word. I do not want to go back: if I had any other plan, I should refuse to come. But I don't know what to do: I don't much care what becomes of me. I will go back if you like."

"Yes, Evie, dearest, yes!"

"But if I do go back, back to the old, intolerable life, there is one thing I must claim! I will not go back as—as a disgraced woman, to be pitied and gossiped over and shunned! If that happens, I will throw myself into the river. Do you understand? Florian will keep silence, you must keep silence too."

"Yes," said Daisy.

"You say yes very easily," said Evelyn, giving her a keen look. The sullen apathy had passed away now, and was succeeded by proud resentment and something not unlike malignancy. "But have you thought how you mean to manage it? Of course not. But I have thought, and all that you will have to do is to hold your tongue. You promise that?"

"Yes, Evelyn, only I don't want to tell more lies than I can help."

"You need not tell lies: you need only hold your tongue. Probably no one will ask you anything about it. You promise? Then tear up that silly message to Gilbert, it's not necessary that he should ever know anything about the matter, and give me a telegraph form. I shall telegraph myself to Gervase."

Then, as Daisy, rather startled by this sudden change of front, still lingered, Evelyn said angrily: "Why do you wait? I am quite capable of sending my own mes-

sages. I will ring the bell and send them when I am ready. Why don't you go into your own room? You can't think that I want more of the sight of you than I am obliged to bear."

Daisy went away without answering. It seemed hard that Evelyn should be so angry with her, yet she could not but acknowledge that her anger was natural. It would pass, no doubt: perhaps some day Evelyn would even thank her for what she had done. This hope was her only comfort in the loneliness of that moment; but it did not suffice to dry her tears at once. These would fall, although she dashed them impatiently away: she was too tired and anxious and sick at heart to restrain them altogether.

She drank the coffee and ate the rolls that were brought to her room, and then she felt stronger. She heard Evelyn's bell ring for the servant who took her telegraphic despatches to the office. Then for a time she heard nothing more. But by and by, certain sounds which came from the room convinced her that Evelyn required her help. She went in and found, not to her great surprise, that Mrs. Vibert's calmness had at last given way, and that she was in the grip of a violent hysterical attack. She was rigid and deathly pale; and the stifled sobs that now and then escaped from her panting bosom would have been actual screams if she had had the strength to cry aloud. Daisy might have thought her in a convulsive fit if she had not once or twice before seen her sister in an attack of the same kind, though by no means so violent. She obtained smelling salts and other remedies; but the hysteria was so violent and so long-continued, that she almost despaired, and began to think of sending for a doctor. But the first word of a doctor seemed to act as a douche on Evelyn. She began to recover almost immediately, and was able before long to

sit up and answer Daisy's questions and remarks, although she did so with a dryness and a reserve which showed that she was still bitterly offended with her.

It was impossible for them to return to Cairo by the early train, and they waited, therefore, for the four o'clock express, which would take them back to Shepherd's in time for dinner. Daisy did her best for her sister's comfort; but she felt that the very sight of her face was hateful just then to Evelyn, and this consciousness did not tend to reassure her. She was glad when they were once more in the train, and safely started on the hot and dusty journey to Cairo.

For some time Evelyn did not speak. She lay at full length on one of the seats and turned her face to the back of the carriage. It was in a moment's lull at one of the stations on the line, that she lifted her head a little and spoke to Daisy without looking at her.

"You may like to know what I said to Gervase," she said, throwing a paper on the floor, so that Daisy had to stoop to pick it up. "It may be a guide to you when you see him."

Daisy smoothed out the crumpled paper, and read its contents. Her face, which, in spite of fatigue and anxiety, had recovered something of its rose-leaf color, gradually paled as she took in the sense of the words. Her eyes dilated: she glanced at Evelyn, then at the paper on her knee, then spoke in a quick, sharp voice.

"You can't mean this," she said. "You are showing me this to frighten me."

"Not at all," said Evelyn, scornfully. "That was the message I sent, and you have promised to abide by what I say."

Daisy read the message again, with parted lips and straining eyes.

"Have followed Daisy to Alexandria with Florian Lingard. Will bring her back safely. Break news carefully to Greville."

"But Evelyn, Evelyn!" cried the girl. "This means that I—I—went away first—with Mr. Lingard! They will think——"

"If they do," said Evelyn, in a hard voice, "it will not matter half so much. I am, to my sorrow, a married woman: would Gervase ever forgive me, do you think? You are only a girl. It will be thought a little escapade on your part, not much worse than staying at Helouan with Gilbert the other night; but it would mean ruin for me. You have insisted on my coming back; you must take the risk, and the blame."

"Gilbert will not—believe it!" gasped Daisy.

"All the better for you if he doesn't. You little idiot, why did you interfere? Don't you see that these things always recoil on the head of the person who meddles?"

"But, Evelyn, you won't leave me always—always—to bear the blame?" faltered Daisy.

"Do you expect that I shall take it on myself?" queried Evelyn.

There was a long silence. Daisy sat with her hands clenched over the paper, with eyes fixed on vacancy, and a blanched, frightened face. She suddenly saw before her all the shame and agony which Evelyn meant her to endure, in revenge for the failure of her schemes. She knew only too well that Gervase Vibert was guided in every way by the wife whom he adored and grumbled at; that Gilbert would, probably, think her denials were prompted only by fear; and that Cairo society would gossip over her adventure until she had scarcely a shred of character left. She knew all this, but she did not realize it altogether. In her bewilderment these things

seemed less terrible to her than the horror of Evelyn's falseness, Evelyn's treachery and cruelty. It was of that she thought, with grief first, and then with a fierce rising indignation.

Why should her happiness be sacrificed for Evelyn's sake? Evelyn, who had broken every law of honor and wifely obedience, was to go scot free, and she was to be punished for Evelyn's fault! It was wicked of Evelyn; and it was too hard to bear. She could not do it, even for Evelyn's sake.

She sat and considered the ways by which she could defeat her sister's designs. Mr. Hoskins would bear testimony for her. He knew of her anxiety, and the reasons why she sought the railway station in her search for Mrs. Vibert. Even Florian Lingard might be appealed to: he would surely say that she was innocent. Gervase and Gilbert would believe these witnesses—but at what cost?

The question smote Daisy like a blow. At the cost of Evelyn's reputation, at the cost of her position in the world, of her happiness for evermore. Gervase would never forgive her: Daisy was sure of that. And had she not said to Evelyn that she would stand by her, would see that she did not suffer, would make her home-coming easy? Yes, she would have done that: she had already concocted some trifling easy story with which she hoped to silence Mr. Vibert's questionings. But she had not expected to bear the blame of Evelyn's misdeeds.

Well, she had promised. That was all that could be said.

"I never broke a promise in my life," said poor Daisy to herself, with a bitter pride. "I will not break my promise to her now. If she chooses to put the blame on me, I will bear it. Perhaps they won't be very hard on me, after all. For I think I may say to Gilbert that it was a mistake; and if he loves me, he will trust me in spite of

all the world. Yes, I think he will; for I never deceived him, never—and he said the other day that I was very truthful and that he could always believe what I said. Yes, I must try—I must try—for Evelyn's sake."

A short, sharp sob escaped her, in spite of herself. She put the paper back into Evelyn's hand.

"You have no right to do it—no right to put the blame on me," she said, in a voice that scarcely sounded like her own. "But I will not contradict you, Evie, whatever you say—if only you will—after this—try to be good to Gervase—and good—good to yourself."

Evelyn made no answer. The sisters were absolutely silent until the train steamed slowly into the station at Cairo, and Gervase Vibert met them at the door.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ACCUSATION.

"So you have brought her back," he said, peering curiously into the carriage. "Hardly worth the trouble, I think,—however, since she is here—jump out, will you?"

"How good of you to come and meet us, Gervase!" said Evelyn, sweetly. She raised her lips to his—a thing which was of rare occurrence with her—and smiled into his eyes. Daisy watched—herself stricken dumb with amazement and dismay. A sort of sickening loathing of Evelyn's falseness came over her: it turned her giddy for a minute or two, as if she had suffered some physical shock. Mr. Vibert, with a pleased yet slightly cynical curl of his lip, returned his wife's salute, then patted her on the shoulder as though to show her that all was well as far as

she was concerned. Then he turned to Daisy, with something of a snarl. "Jump out, can't you? I suppose you don't intend us to wait here for you all day?"

The tone was so different from anything that Daisy had ever heard directed towards her, that she started and flushed with anger. Then she remembered. This, she supposed, was what she would have to endure—at first. Perhaps Gervase's anger would cool down by and by. At present she must put up with a little incivility. She descended from the carriage, with Evelyn's bag in her hand and looked at him doubtfully. In spite of her bold front Daisy was naturally timid; and the timidity, which showed itself under these unforeseen circumstances, looked, in Mr. Vibert's eyes, uncommonly like a sign of guilt. He gave a sort of snort of contempt and anger, offered his arm ceremoniously to his wife, and walked out of the station. Daisy was left to follow with the bag. She entered the carriage which was in waiting, but without a helping hand or a word of attention. Mr. Vibert had always been peculiarly kind and friendly hitherto, and Daisy felt the change bitterly. What did he think of her? she asked herself, as they drove back to the hotel, and he carefully avoided speaking to her or even looking in her direction. But what he thought she was very soon to know.

"I think we can dispense with the pleasure of your company at dinner to-night," he said with icy politeness, when they reached the hotel. "Your sister will order something for you in your own room. Afterwards, I should like a little conversation with you."

Daisy just glanced at Evelyn. Was she going to stand by and calmly see her thrust into the background—perhaps insulted and disgraced? Evelyn's face was perfectly calm. If it wore any expression at all, it was one of ill-natured triumph. Daisy understood it: there was no help to be got from Evelyn. She went upstairs without a word; and Mr.

and Mrs. Vibert, after a few words together, went at once to the dining-room where the table d'hôte was now in full swing. Perhaps Evelyn had not much appetite—any more than Daisy had in the solitude of her own room—but she pretended to eat, and smiled sweetly on her husband, and wore the mask of feigned commiseration for her naughty little sister, and a great desire to conceal her faults.

“It won’t do, you know,” Mr. Vibert said, after listening to some of her half-pitying, half-condemnatory remarks. “You need not spend your time in defending her, Evelyn. Of course, she’s your sister, and I do not wish to be hard on her; but I mean to tell her very plainly what I think of her conduct.”

They were dining at a side-table, and could therefore discuss the matter with freedom. Evelyn suddenly turned pale, and leaned back in her chair, as if overcome by the prospect of what was before her sister. Mr. Vibert looked at her and his look softened.

“Don’t be afraid, my dear. I shall not forget what she is to you—nor what you are to me.”

He did not often speak so tenderly, and small wonder was it that Evelyn’s heart sickened a little over the task she had undertaken, or that she turned her head away to conceal the tremor of her lip. After that, she gave up the attempt to eat, and sat almost silent, while her husband, something of a gourmand still, notwithstanding his ill-health, finished his dinner and drank his wine, with the air of a connoisseur.

Daisy, meanwhile, was in her own room, and when she had sent her evening meal away, and was waiting in the dimly-lighted, hot, little room, wondering what was going to befall her next, she heard a tap at the door. On opening it, she found herself face to face with Evelyn.

“Gervase wants you. He is in his sitting-room,” said Evelyn, without coming in. Daisy noticed that she would

not look at her, and gathered a little hope from that slight sign of shame.

"Oh, Evelyn, is this to go on?" she said, pleadingly.

"You have brought it on yourself," was the cold rejoinder. Then in a lower tone—"Why need you have meddled?"

Daisy looked her full in the face. "If I hadn't meddled, you would have gone to ruin," she said.

"Be content with having saved me from that fate then," said Mrs. Vibert, in a tone of irony. "You seem anxious enough to escape the consequences of what you chose to do."

Daisy was worsted; she knew she was, and she could not think of a reply. She felt that there were arguments to urge—there were instincts of truth and honor which Evelyn ought to possess—but the habit of her life was against putting these deeper feelings into words. "If you *like* to be so mean"—it was a miserably childish thing to say, but no other words occurred to her—"If you *like* to be so mean, well, *do!* My friends will believe what I say, in spite of all your lies."

Evelyn's mocking laugh rang in her ears, as she walked along the corridor, to the room where Mr. Vibert usually spent his evenings; and the momentary spirit of pique and anger died down, to be succeeded by a greater dread and a deeper depression than any that the girl had ever known.

Mr. Vibert's room was a tiny apartment, opening out from his bedroom, furnished with the usual hotel splendors of crimson velvet and looking glasses—a somewhat inappropriate kind of furniture, for houses in the land of Egypt, as it was peculiarly hot and heavy-looking. The room had been a dressing-room, but was turned into a sitting-room for Mr. Vibert's convenience when he found that he wanted a place in which to read or write with Christine.

He was now sitting on the little velvet couch before which stood a marble-topped table littered with books and papers. Daisy paused for a minute on entering, and looked at him uncertainly. She could not help thinking that she had seldom seen him with so sour and disagreeable an expression on his face.

"Well, Miss Daisy Touchwood," he said, dryly, "so you are here in Cairo after all."

She did not answer, but looked him steadily in the face.

"You can sit down," he said, indicating a cane-bottomed chair with his hand.

"I prefer to stand, thank you," said Daisy. "I suppose you don't want me for long."

"How can I tell how long I shall be?" said Mr. Vibert, pettishly. "I can't be bound to any particular minute. I have no doubt," with a passing sneer, "that you don't feel quite comfortable—that you have some sensation of shame left in you, which prevents your liking to sit in my presence—nevertheless, for my convenience, and because I prefer to talk to you while you are sitting instead of standing, I must again request you to take a chair."

"I will sit down, if you like," said Daisy, with a passionate thrill in her voice, "but I haven't the slightest shame about it, I don't know what you mean."

"You are perfectly shameless, then?" said Mr. Vibert, looking at her, with cold curiosity. "I am to understand that you feel no compunction for your conduct?"

Daisy opened her lips for an angry negative—and closed them again. What was she to do? If she was really going to bear the blame that Evelyn was putting on her shoulders, she must not deny and contradict. But should she bear it or not? She was silent, and Mr. Vibert put her silence down to the confession of guilt.

"I am glad that you do not attempt to justify yourself," he said, severely.

"You have not yet told me what you accuse me of doing," she said, with eyes cast down and an involuntary sullenness of manner which did not prepossess her brother-in-law in her favor.

"Of doing! Well, I hardly thought I need put the matter into words; but since you will have it!—What I mean is that you—*you*, Daisy Touchwood, my wife's sister, and engaged to be married to Captain Greville—you ran away from home last night with that scoundrel, Florian; the impostor who took Lingard's name and meant to take his property. Whether he thought of marrying you, Heaven knows! I should say not; and I should say that you had given that part of the business very little thought. You ran away with this man out of girlish folly and heedlessness, no doubt: I am willing to give it no harsher name—but just tell me one thing: did he ever speak of marriage to you?"

"No," said Daisy, taken off her guard, and not seeing till too late how damaging was this admission.

"And yet you eloped with him, you wretched girl!" cried Mr. Vibert, in a high, thin voice of anger.

"No, no, no! Don't say that," cried Daisy, impetuously; and then, covering her face with her hands she burst into tears.

"Don't say that? but pray, what else am I to say?" exclaimed her incensed brother-in-law. "I wish I could take any other view of the matter. Are you aware that but for Evelyn's prompt action in following you and bringing you back, you would now be alone with that man and at his mercy? Are you blind to the consequences of your own acts? You are not a child: you are not ignorant. When you chose to go away with that man, alone, you must have known that you were going to become his mistress? And all the world knows it too."

"All the world?" Daisy repeated faintly.

"Do you not know that you were seen by several people first at the Continental, and then at the railway station? Even Mr. Hoskins, your professed admirer, cannot clear you. He was there, it seems, and I questioned him myself, but he had nothing coherent to say. Every one has heard the story by this time——"

"And believes it?"

"And believes it. Why should it not be believed?"

"Has—has Gilbert heard it, too?" said Daisy, looking up with a new terror in her face.

"Captain Greville has heard it too. Of course it is impossible for us to hold him to his engagement. I told him I would send back his ring, presents, and letters at once. You had better give me the ring—I see you have the bad taste to be wearing it still."

The girl drew back, flushing all over, and then turning deadly pale. She put her right hand over the ring, and held it fast.

"I will give it to no one but Gilbert," she said. "He gave it me—and if he wants it, he shall have it back—but only from me."

"If he wants it! Naturally, he wants it. Do you suppose, you unhappy, misguided girl, that he wants to marry you now—after this escapade? The one by which you secured him was bad enough, though it was innocent; but this—*this*——"

"That's enough," said Daisy, abruptly; she was beaten down, but not broken yet, and she could not endure much more. "I had better hear what Gilbert thinks from himself and no one else. I'll speak to him."

"I doubt, very much whether he will speak to you," said Mr. Vibert, in an exasperated tone. He was irritated by the girl, with her white face and reddened eyelids, who yet preserved such a curious independence of tone, and would not acknowledge herself to have been in the wrong! He

began, honestly and soberly, to wonder whether she was not a very bad girl indeed.

"Not speak to me?" said Daisy, at first uncomprehending, and then incredulous. "But that's absurd, you know. Gilbert will speak to me, of course, if I ask him. And I think you will find that he has more faith in me than you seem to have, and that *he* will believe in me in spite of appearances."

"Do you mean that you positively expect Gilbert to continue his engagement to you?"

Daisy avoided a direct answer. "I think he will trust me," she said, proudly. Then with a touch of her old sharpness: "He isn't worth keeping, if he won't do that."

Mr. Vibert fell back in his chair, with a movement of shocked surprise.

"I am amazed," he said, "I am amazed." And then he kept silent for a little while, regarding Daisy with mingled consternation and surprise. "You don't seem to understand your position," he said at length, in a hushed voice. "Perhaps I had better let Evelyn explain it to you a little more."

"No, no, not Evelyn. Say what you like; explain it to me," said Daisy, in a voice scarcely louder than his own.

"It's come to this," said Mr. Vibert, emphatically. "You have lost your reputation, girl. You may be as innocent of evil as you profess to be, but nobody will believe it. To run away with a man, and to come back unmarried, without him, is enough to wreck any woman's future. Your friends will cut you, and your relations can't defend you. The women whom you knew yesterday will pass you in the street to-day without speaking. I know what it will be, as well as if I had seen it all. You have ruined yourself."

Daisy looked at him with dilated, questioning eyes.

Was it true? Yes, it was true, she knew : and still more would it be true for Evelyn if it were known that it was she, and not Daisy, who had quitted Cairo for Florian's sake. But there was one escape from misery and suspicion still.

"Gervase," she said, "if Gilbert were to stand by me, don't you think I should get through all right after all? If he were to believe in me——"

"Greville is not such a fool!" said Mr. Vibert.

"But it would make all the difference, would it not?"

"It would make a great deal of difference, no doubt. But it is a ridiculous thing to think that he would 'trust' you, as you call it, when you do not even deny the facts. No, I am sorry for you, Daisy, and I have always wished you well; but I can't do with you here any longer. I won't have you with my wife after this. You must go back to England and live with your Aunt Mercer. I will make you an allowance—but back you go, as soon as I can find some one who will take care of you on the voyage. You cannot stay here. That was what I wished to say to you, and that is all. I think you had better go to bed and think over what I have been saying; and I hope that before you leave Cairo I shall hear some proper expression of regret for your late conduct."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A GREAT TEMPTATION.

THUS Daisy was dismissed; and Mr. Vibert told himself that he had been very lenient with her, and not given her half the "talking to" that she deserved. "But her Aunt Mercer will do all that," he said, with a grim little chuckle at the thought. "Her Aunt Mercer will not let her off so

easily. Daisy will not soon hear the last of it from her." And again he smiled at the prospect of Daisy's sojourn in a little English village, with an aunt of peculiarly rigid views and narrow means, who would treat the girl's attempt at an elopement (so Gervase Vibert put it to himself) as a crime indeed. "Do her good!" he muttered to himself. "She shall not have the chance of too much liberty, for some time to come. The little hussy! I wouldn't have thought it of her after all. A good thing Evelyn found it out in time and brought her back—ah, here she is!"

"You have spoken to Daisy?" said his wife, rather nervously, as she entered the room.

"Yes, I've spoken to her. Where is she? what is she doing now?"

"Crying in her own room," said Evelyn, rather shortly. Then, in a lower tone, "It's no use being too hard on her: it came to nothing, you see."

"But it might have come to something: it was not her fault that it did not," said Mr. Vibert, dryly. "And coming to something meant in this case, shame and misery and utter ruin——"

"Oh, Gervase, don't—don't!"

"Well, my dear, it is only the truth. I have told the girl what the consequences of her criminal folly are likely to be. She will be cut by every one of our acquaintances in Cairo, that's the first thing."

"Then let us leave Cairo at once," said Evelyn, feverishly. "Let us go to some place where nobody knows us—where it will all die down and be done with."

"Leave Cairo! Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Vibert, in his most obstinate tones. "Leave a place that suits me admirably, just because a foolish and wicked girl chose to make a scandal? Not I. It is Daisy that will have to go, my dear Evelyn, and the sooner we write to Miss Mercer to receive her the better."

"Aunt Mercer!" said Evelyn, with a little start. "Why, Gervase, she hates us like poison!—and she is so poor."

"I'll make her a suitable allowance," said Mr. Vibert, with a nod. "I don't mean your sister to go without proper food and clothes—you need not be afraid of that, Evelyn. For your sake, I am willing to provide for Daisy. But I will not have her here any longer: she may go to Miss Mercer, and if, at some future time, she shows herself thoroughly repentant, she may perhaps come back to us—but not yet for awhile."

"You are very kind, Gervase," said Evelyn, with downcast eyes, and a strange, furtive look on her beautiful face. She was standing with her hand on the arm of the sofa, and he noticed how it trembled. He was not a demonstrative man, but he was fond of his young wife, and he put his hand over hers with a protecting tenderness.

"Don't be afraid, my dear," he said. "I won't be hard on her. But it will do a girl like that no harm to live quietly with her aunt for a time—it's a very light punishment, I'm sure."

"Daisy will hate it so!" said Evelyn, and there was a sob in her voice.

"Well, let her hate it," said Mr. Vibert, his face hardening. "She deserves to do something that she hates. You don't consider what she has escaped. She might have been at this very moment——"

"Don't go on, Gervase! Even if she had—she might have come back to us—married—and we should have forgiven her——"

She spoke falteringly, and was not prepared for the storm-cloud that gathered in her husband's brow.

"Don't let me hear you speaking in that way: I don't like it," he said sharply. "It sounds as if you had too little regard for womanly purity and dignity. The loss of that is a thing not to be forgiven. I pass it over leniently in

Daisy's case because I hope she was more giddy and foolish than vicious, but in the case of any woman old enough to know what she was about, I consider that no pardon is possible."

Evelyn shuddered a little, and drew back. "There was Mrs. Middleton," she said, alluding to the story of an erring wife and a forgiving husband which had recently excited all English society in Cairo. "She was pardoned——"

"And wrongly so," said Mr. Vibert in a decided tone. "If I had been her husband I would have turned her out of doors and never seen her face again. Mercy is mere weakness in cases of that kind."

Then, as his wife sighed and moved farther away, he added in a kinder tone, "Don't fret, Evelyn. You saved her, and I give you credit for it. She will be well looked after at Miss Mercer's, and she shan't be allowed to want. We'll look out for somebody who is going to England, and send her under their escort. Don't worry yourself."

Evelyn made no answer, and departed without even showing her face. Mr. Vibert shrugged his shoulders over the perversity of women, when he was left alone. He thought that he had been extremely generous, but certainly his generosity did not receive its meed of praise from his wife.

Evelyn went straight to her sister's room. She was moved by a vague yet poignant sense of shame, and a desire to mitigate as far as possible the evil that she had brought upon Daisy. She had heard the girl give way to a wild burst of tears as soon as she had shut herself into her room; and she expected to find her still weeping; but as soon as she opened the door she saw that the paroxysm of grief was passed. Daisy was perfectly calm now, though very pale: she had let down her hair, which hung about

her shoulders like a golden cloud, and she had a brush in her hand. When Evelyn appeared, she paused and regarded her elder sister fixedly.

"What do you want?" she said, in a cold, hard tone.

"Oh—just to see how you are," Evelyn answered, in some confusion.

"I think you had better leave me alone," said Daisy, composedly. "I'm not in the mood to talk to you. You know very well what I've had to go through for your sake; and—I feel wicked about it just now: I can't bear the sight of you."

"You don't seem to think of what I have had to go through!" said Evelyn, with quivering lips.

"Oh, *you*?" There was a fine contempt in Daisy's tone. "I don't believe you care a straw for anybody in the whole world. I do,—and that is the difference between us."

"Daisy, Daisy, indeed I do. I care for you, though you may not believe it. Oh, if you would only see the thing in the right light! He has just said that he would turn his wife out of doors, if any such thing happened—if he even suspected her; and to you, Daisy, it only means going to stay for a few weeks or months with Aunt Mercer; then the whole thing will blow over, and nobody will remember it."

"I shall always remember it," said Daisy, dryly.

"And I daresay," pursued Evelyn, in a faltering voice, "that Gilbert will not believe any harm of you. I'll speak to him myself, if you like, and tell him—say to him—that you did not mean anything bad—that it was all a mistake——"

"Yes, anything but the truth. You need not speak to him at all! Do you think I want to owe him to your lies? Yes, lies—lies—lies! I will speak to him myself, and I will tell him what I choose."

"Not about me—not about——"

"If he trusts me, it will be all right. I'll tell him nothing, then. But if he will not believe me—what shall I do then? I can't tell—I don't know whether I shall keep silence or not, even for your sake, Evelyn. Why should I sacrifice all my happiness for you, I wonder?"

She spoke almost with fierceness, and Evelyn cowered beneath the words. Daisy's blue eyes glowed with a strange fire, and her pale little face took on an expression of dignity which few people had seen there before.

"It isn't what Gervase says that wounds me. I don't mind being cut by Cairo society, and gossiped about and pitied and reproved. I don't mind being sent to Aunt Mercer, and lectured on my wickedness. All these things would be nothing to me, so long as I kept the trust and confidence of the one man I love. I dare say that sounds very sentimental to you, but it's true. I care more for what Gilbert thinks than for anything else in the world, and if he will believe in me—well, then, I shall be quite satisfied."

"And if he does not believe in you," said Evelyn, hanging her head, "you will tell him all—and he will tell Gervase—and I shall be turned out of the house. I hope you will enjoy the happiness you will have gained, while I am wandering about the streets, without a home or a friend in the world."

Her voice sank to pathos: she pressed her embroidered handkerchief to her eyes, and sobbed a little at the picture her words had called up. Daisy turned her back upon her, and spoke sharply—harshly—bitterly.

"I wish you would go," she said; "I don't know what I shall do—yet. You had better go away and leave me to myself."

"Daisy, you don't know how miserable you make me! Won't you at least kiss me—and—and—forgive me?"

"No, I will not," said Daisy, with some fierceness.

"You are a wicked, deceitful woman, and I don't want to have anything to do with you. Go out of my room."

And Evelyn went, with a handkerchief at her eyes, and a deeply injured air; while Daisy, whose hardly-won composure had been rudely assailed, fell to pacing the floor, as a means of preventing herself from another burst of tears.

What if Gilbert would not believe her word? What should she do? The temptation to clear herself at Evelyn's expense was strong upon her. And it would not be wrong to do it. Surely she would be justified by the exigencies of the case! Her whole happiness, Gilbert's happiness—perhaps their whole life together would be ruined if she kept silence. Did sisterly love demand so much from her? And was it worth while?

She clenched her hands and set her teeth to choke down the sobs that threatened to overcome her, when she thought of the possibility that Gilbert would disbelieve her word, and would refuse to dispense with the explanation which she did not want to give. She knew by this time how fastidious was his nature. If he did not trust her, she was convinced that he would drop her like a hot coal: he would never marry a woman whom he could not trust. In her own heart, Daisy knew that in spite of her past flirtations and mad escapades, she was worthy of his confidence. And it was hard to throw it away—and with it all her prospects of happiness—for the sake of a woman like Evelyn Vibert, whose true nature—hard, shallow, fickle, unprincipled—now showed itself to Daisy in its true colors.

The temptation was strong. The fight was hard. Even Daisy, as she at last crept into bed, did not know what the end would be.

She had breakfast in her own room; and after breakfast, she resolved to take matters into her own hands.

She wrote a note to Captain Greville, and despatched it to his quarters by one of the hotel servants. The mis-sive was curt enough.

“DEAR GILBERT :

“Will you come here and see me for a few minutes. I have something to say. I shall be on the balcony.

“DAISY TOUCHWOOD.”

She did not usually sign her name in this formal way, but on this occasion she felt that formality became her. When she had sent the note, she walked out on the veranda, as she usually did after breakfast, and waited for his coming. But before long she found her position uncomfortable. People looked at her strangely. One or two of her old acquaintances feigned not to see her at all. Mrs. Lingard, whom she met in the doorway, drew herself up a little and gave her the cut direct ; even Christine, to whom she looked with unwonted eagerness for a greeting, gave her only a grave, slight bow. It was evident that she was under a cloud.

Christine was acting under her mother's instructions, for Mrs. Lingard was much scandalized by the story that she had heard of Daisy's flight from Cairo ; but personally she believed that the escapade had been exaggerated, for Daisy always seemed to her too bold and defiant to practice deceit or to be capable of an intrigue. And she did not suspect in the least that the coldness of her manner would cause the girl any pain. Daisy had never behaved with friendliness to her ; and Christine could not guess that her averted eyes and studied gravity brought one more pang to a heart that was already wrung with silent suffering.

Daisy sought out a secluded seat, where she could watch for Captain Greville without being seen. ~~It was~~

not very long before he appeared. He had evidently come without a moment's delay. She was pleased by the loverlike haste. But when she cast a glance at his face, her pleasure was succeeded by fear. It was a face of iron : inflexible, hard, resolute ; and she knew that its expression boded nothing good to her.

He saw her almost at once, and came to her side, bowing formally, but not offering his hand.

"I am glad you have come," she said, looking up at him. "I wanted to speak to you."

He was not in a charitable mood ; but he could not help being struck with the change in the infantine little face before him. The childishness was there still, but it was a wan and pathetic childishness ; the fair cheeks were white, and there were black shadows under the large blue eyes, which looked at him so wistfully. Gilbert's heart smote him, for he suddenly reflected that if he had loved this girl, he should love her still for the extremity of her grief, for her helplessness, for the pity of it all. As it was—he found it hard to be even sorry for her."

"Is it necessary?" he asked quietly. "I am sorry to say that I have a very important engagement in half-an-hour ; so I must ask you to be as brief as you can be with convenience."

How wistfully she looked at him ! And what an innocent baby-face it was ! Greville looked away.

"Will you come into the garden then?" she said. "There are so many people passing and re-passing here."

"Certainly." And Daisy led the way.

It was not much of a garden, but it afforded shelter and a certain amount of seclusion to people who did not wish to be observed. Daisy sat down on a garden seat, and Greville stood near her. He waited for her to begin ; as Daisy noticed, he would not help her by a single word. He even looked at his watch.

"Gervase says," she began, with nervous haste, at last, "that you think—he thinks, at least, that our engagement ought to be at an end."

Captain Greville smiled ironically. "I thought," he said, "that you had already broken it."

"I have not broken it," said Daisy.

There was an ominous glitter in Greville's eyes; he looked very stern as he replied.

"I do not understand you, Miss Touchwood. You have taken the best possible way of letting me know that my attentions were unwelcome to you, and I can but withdraw them. When a lady resorts to the somewhat desperate expedient of running away—I can only assure you that it was quite unnecessary. If you had even hinted to me that you had a preference for any one, I should not have put the slightest obstacle in your way."

"But you mistake! you mistake!" cried Daisy. "Oh! you need not insult me like this—you need not say these things—I have heard them from Gervase—but from *you*!"

Her lip was trembling, and her blue eyes swam in tears. Greville answered with ceremonious politeness.

"I beg your pardon; I had no desire to say what would hurt or offend you. Personally I think it a pity that you came back with Mrs. Vibert. If I can do anything towards arranging matters, I shall be very glad. Perhaps you can give me Mr. Florian's address?"

"You believe, then," said Daisy, now white to the lips, "that I ran away with that man?"

Greville shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly. "You put it into very plain words," he said. "I believe, of course, what Mr. Vibert told me. I supposed he knew."

"But you have not asked *me*; you have not heard what I have to say."

"I think I would rather not hear, Miss Touchwood," said Greville, steadily.

And looking at the set composure of his face, Daisy felt that her cause was lost. Unless, indeed, she could sacrifice Evelyn, and save herself.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A LOYAL HEART.

It was a terrible temptation. Daisy knew—or thought she knew—that she could make him believe her word. If she told him the whole story, calling Mr. Hoskins to bear witness as to the reason of her flight, if she showed him how Evelyn was to blame, and not herself, would he not take her in his arms and bid her be brave, and promise to stand by her to the world's end, and to fight down the ugly scandal against her name and fame?

Daisy heartily believed that he would do all this. He would never be daunted by a rumor; if she herself were good and true, he was too proud and strong a man to care what the world might say of her. And could she not tell him the story, and bind him to secrecy? For her sake—if he loved her—he would screen Evelyn as she had done.

But would he? "If he loved her," she had said to herself. Now and then it had appeared to her with great vividness, that he did not love her. And if love were not present, if it were a matter merely of honor and loyalty and pride, would he permit her to keep her secret? Might he not insist that the blame should rest on the shoulders of the rightful offender, or that at least Evelyn's husband should no longer be deceived.

Daisy was mistaken in this. If she had taken Gilbert Greville into her confidence, he would have honored her

for her sisterly love, and would have guarded the secret as jealously as she herself could have done. He was capable of great deeds for honor's sake ; capable, even, of letting his wife be blamed unjustly rather than betray a secret and bring ruin upon a woman. But Daisy did not understand him, and she thought it better to hold her tongue.

The old defect in their intercourse showed itself now. If Gilbert had ever loved her, she would have known by instinct that she might trust him. He would have said, " Let us fight this thing down together ; for I know without being told that you would neither deceive nor betray." But he had never loved her, never even seen the better side of her, the nobler qualities that she possessed ; and the consequence was that she feared him ; for it is only a very perfect love that casts out fear. She was afraid to trust him. Hence came her temptation. Should she risk Evelyn's reputation by telling him the secret ? If she did so, and if he told Gervase, what would happen ? She might secure her own happiness, but at the same time she would bring shame, disgrace, ruin upon her sister. Could she do that ?

She had a loyal heart, although she was counted fast and frivolous by those who judged only from the outside. Evelyn had always been dear to her—dearer than most sisters are to one another—in spite of a coldness and selfishness which had often made Daisy suffer, and which the girl tried to hide even from herself. Yes, she loved Evelyn dearly, and could not say the words that would bring her to disgrace and punishment. Evelyn, homeless, friendless—roaming about the world as an outcast, while she, Daisy, was lapped in comfort and happiness ? It was not to be thought of for a moment. She strangled the temptation, and threw it from her, though with white lips and an aching heart.

"There is only one thing I should like to tell you," she said to Captain Greville; and there was a strange, subtle change in her expression which startled and almost annoyed him. "There is some mistake—I may say that much: I am not to blame—in the way you think. I can't explain; but if you could only have trusted me——"

Greville was puzzled and vexed; he uttered the short, sharp laugh of embarrassment which sounded like scorn.

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not go to Alexandria the night before last with that man Florian?"

"And Evelyn," faltered Daisy; but she knew that this plea would avail her nothing. To Greville, it sounded worse than a subterfuge.

"With Mrs. Vibert—yes, fortunately. But I don't think you had invited Mrs. Vibert to accompany you. Miss Touchwood, it is extremely painful to me to speak on this subject at all; but you have insisted upon it. I certainly thought that Mr. Vibert knew what you wished when he spoke of breaking off our engagement; and—really—I don't see what else there is to be done."

"No," said the girl, with a catch in her voice. "I don't suppose there is anything else to be done." And very slowly she drew the diamond ring that he had given her from her finger, and weighed it for a moment in the palm of her hand. "Here is your ring," she said, at last, in a whisper.

Gilbert looked at her: he was more puzzled than ever.

"Daisy," he said, impulsively, "if I am wrong—if there is anything you can explain——"

Ah, that temptation to betray! It was worse than ever now. Daisy rose up, flushing to the temples, and the ring rolled to the ground. "No," she said, in a strained, hard voice, "I have nothing to explain."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing. You had better go away. It is all over."

"It is not my fault that it is over," said Greville, rather bitterly.

Daisy, who had moved away from him a little, looked back over her shoulder with a strained, haggard smile.

"No, it's not your fault," she said. "And it isn't mine either—exactly : only it is no use saying that. Good-bye, Captain Greville. They are going to send me back to England, so I shall most likely never see you again. Won't you—won't you—shake hands before you go?"

He gave her his hand and bowed low over hers, with a grave courtesy which provoked her to bitter laughter. "You are very polite," she said, with a return to her usual lightness of tone, "but I suppose politeness is natural to you—more natural to you than to me ; but I am wishing you would go, don't you see? There's your ring on the path. Good-bye, Captain Greville, and good luck to you!"

Gilbert had been softened and moved for a minute or two ; but the change of tone repelled him. He drew himself up rather stiffly, and left her with a bow : he would not condescend to pick up the ring, or to say another word. He marched back to the hotel with his shoulders squared and his head well-up : he was not going to have it said that he looked grieved or depressed because that little minx had treated him so abominably. He was extremely angry with himself and with her : he had been wounded in his tenderest point, and the pride that had been offended would not permit him to show a token of regret.

Once—only once—he glanced back, before turning a corner that would hide him from sight. Daisy was leaning against the trunk of a palm-tree : her hands hung by her sides, and her whole attitude expressed utter fatigue and dejection. Again Greville felt the momentary doubt and wonder that he had experienced before. Daisy was an enigma to him. He believed the worst of her : he be

lieved every detail of the stories that had been poured into his ear ; and yet—when he was with her—he was conscious of something that appealed to his pity : almost to his respect. She had no air of guilt about her : she had even asked him to trust her, and he had refused. Had he been right ?

“ What a fool I am ! ” he soliloquized, as he pursued his homeward path. “ Just because a girl has pretty blue eyes and a baby face I must needs question the evidence of my own senses, and the proofs given me by her sister and brother ! Surely they would not condemn her without good reason ? The sooner she goes to England the better, poor girl. Perhaps under control and good influences she may learn to restrain her mad, wild instincts a little. But to make her one’s wife, after that last affair ! It would be impossible. Thank Heaven it happened *before* she became my wife ! ”

Then his thoughts fled to one who, as he well knew, would never imperil his honor, nor cause him a moment’s distrust. “ My sweet Christine ! ” he said to himself, with a long-drawn sigh. “ I am free now to speak to her : it will not be long, I hope, before she is my wife—my dear and honored wife ! ”

Meanwhile, Daisy stood leaning against the palm-tree, too weary and sad to move. She must have stood there for some minutes when another voice and step roused her from her reverie.

“ Miss Daisy ! It is you, at last. I have been looking for you everywhere.”

Mr. Hoskins stood before her. At the sight of him, Daisy started a little, and changed color.

“ Oh, Mr. Hoskins, I wanted to see you,” she said.

“ Miss Daisy, you are sick. You are quite pale, and you have no voice. Are you faint ? Can I do anything for you ? ”

"No," said Daisy, still in the same extinguished voice. "Nothing at all. Except—yes ; do you see that ring on the path before you ?"

Mr. Hoskins looked round vacantly, and finally discovered the jewel, which he contemplated with a look of extreme surprise.

"Surely, Miss Daisy," he said, with bashful reticence, "that is a ring—a ring that you used once to wear."

"My engagement ring," said Daisy, with quiet scorn. "Of course it is." She moved—slowly, like a wounded thing—to the bench, and sat down. "I want you to pick it—up," she went on. "There—don't give it to me ; I don't want to touch it again. Do you mind making a parcel of it—a neat little white paper parcel, you know—and sending it to Captain Greville ? He has left it behind him by mistake."

"Does that mean——"

"It means that the engagement is broken off. Yes," said Daisy, with a hard, little laugh. "It doesn't matter, you know. Girls often break off their engagements. We didn't get on very well."

"Miss Daisy," said Hoskins, with tremulous eagerness, "I am not much in the world, and I do not know much of what goes on in Cairo, but a rumor came to my ears this morning which brought me here to find you. I fear that I may have been somewhat to blame for a misunderstanding. When Mr. Vibert questioned me yesterday, I did not dare to mention to him that you were in search of his wife the night before. I bungled, I am afraid. But I did not like to make mischief. Tell me, was I right or was I wrong ? I will do anything you please."

"You were quite right, Mr. Hoskins," said Daisy, with sudden and complete cordiality. She turned to him with shining eyes and a hot, flushed face. "I would not for

the world that Gervase knew. Promise me—promise me faithfully that you will not tell.”

“I will certainly not tell, Miss Daisy,” said the young man, whose simple soul had not grasped the fact that by suppressing the truth he was helping to shatter poor Daisy’s chance of happiness; “I would not betray your secrets or your sister’s for the world.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hoskins. You are very good and very kind. And you will not tell anybody—ever, will you? If they ask you anything, just refer them to me. You saw me at the station—that is all you need say, you know, if you are asked.”

“Miss Daisy, I will do just as you please.” But Hoskins’ honest face suddenly grew clouded. “I offended you once before by telling you what people said,” he murmured, “and I don’t want to do it again.”

“You couldn’t offend me now if you tried,” said the girl. “I don’t care enough about anything. I suppose people are talking—well, let them talk. They won’t do me either good or harm.”

“No harm? You are sure of that?”

Daisy turned her blue eyes, upon him with a smile. “I am tired of Cairo,” she said. “I am going back to England as soon as an escort can be found for me. It does not in the least matter to me, you see, what people say.”

“But if they blame you for your kindness and generosity to your sister! Is it possible that they do not understand?” cried Hoskins, dimly beginning to see how matters stood. “You are going to England? You have broken off your engagement? Is it not my duty to explain?”

“If you say a word, I’ll never speak to you again!” cried Daisy, fiercely. Then, in a quieter tone: “You know you promised.”

Hoskins looked at her in silence for a minute or two. Then a great glow came over his face, and a great light

into his eyes : he lost his timidity and his awkwardness in the transforming influence of a great love. He came up to the girl and quietly took her hand in his.

"Daisy, won't you marry me?" he said.

She did not draw her hand away at once. She looked at him with a dull wonder, and tried to smile.

"You don't understand," she said. "People are saying evil things of me—you were right there; it would never do for you to marry me. Besides I don't love you, and you would not like me to marry you when I loved another man? That would seem dreadful to me : I could not do that; although," with a bitter, musing smile upon her lips, "people do say that I am such a wicked girl."

"You are a saint—a heroine—a martyr!" cried poor Hoskins, in his fervor of admiring love; and he dropped on his knees and would have kissed her hand if she had permitted him. But she drew herself away somewhat angrily.

"Mr. Hoskins, I wish you wouldn't be so absurd. Anybody might see you. Do get up, and let me alone."

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, scrambling ruefully to his feet. "It was only because I want you to understand how I admire you and love you. But that is nothing to you, I know. My love is not worth your acceptance."

Daisy looked at him with softened, miserable eyes. "It isn't that," she said, much more gently than she generally spoke. "I am glad. I think that you *care*. It is good of you."

"Good of me to love you! I don't see how that can be!"

"Oh, yes, it is," said Daisy, seriously, "for I am not the sort of girl that people care for : I'm sure of that now. However, it's no use. Don't talk to me about it, please. I don't want anybody to speak to me of love again. Will

you take that ring, or send it, to Captain Greville, please?"

"I would go to the end of the world for you," said Hoskins, heartily: and he departed, being anxious to secure Daisy's favor by executing her behests at once.

She did not see him again that day, although she heard that he came and asked for her; but soon after his departure, she found that her head ached and that she was feeling sick and cold; and she crept up to her room and lay down upon the bed, shutting out the light of day. Evelyn came in to see her once or twice, but Daisy would not speak, so Mrs. Vibert finally decided that she was sulky, and that there was no use in attending to her. She and her husband drove out together to see a polo match that afternoon, and afterwards dined with the General. Daisy had been included in the invitation, but of course she would have been left at home, even without the headache which formed so convenient an excuse for her absence. Some people wondered at the Viberts' audacity in showing their faces abroad so soon after Miss Touchwood's much-talked-of escapade; but finally it was agreed that poor, dear, sweet Mrs. Vibert was not to be blamed for her sister's misdeeds, and that she should not suffer for them socially. Besides, the poor deluded girl—who must be dreadfully depraved, or she would never have tried to run away with that wretched man when she was engaged to that delightful Captain Greville—the poor deluded girl was to be sent to England immediately, and Cairo society would be rid of her.

About eight in the evening, Daisy rose from her bed. She was feverishly eager for fresh air, and she thought that she might sit on the balcony for a little time, as almost everybody else was at dinner. *Almost* everybody—not quite all. For in a dim corner, she descried her old enemy, Christine Lingard, and beside her, speaking

low and with apparent earnestness, stood Captain Gilbert Greville.

It was pure accident. Gilbert would not have been clumsy and precipitate enough to make love to Christine on the very day when his engagement to Daisy was broken off; and they were only waiting for the appearance of Mrs. Lingard and the General before going in to dinner; but to Daisy, sore and sick at heart, it seemed certain that Gilbert had taken the earliest opportunity of paying warm attention to Christine.

She cared for the fresh air no longer. She stole upstairs again, and cast herself down on her bed. The night seemed hot and stifling around her, and she tossed to and fro in unconquerable restlessness—that restlessness of fever which is one of the scourges to European residents of the cities of the East.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

“So Miss Touchwood is ill, I hear,” said the General, a day or two later, in an innocently inquiring way. He had never been able quite to fathom the mystery of Greville’s broken engagement and the cloud that hung over Daisy. He had taken a kind of interest in the girl, especially when he knew that she was engaged to Gilbert, with whom he had some previous acquaintance; and the change that had come over their relations was a cause of perplexity and pain to him. And even Miss Lingard, who looked severe when Daisy’s name was mentioned, had not liked to enlighten him on the subject of the girl’s enormities.

"Yes," the old lady said, rather primly, "she has a touch of fever."

"More than a touch, mother," Nell interposed; "I saw Mrs. Vibert on the stairs this morning, and she said she was afraid that her sister was going to be seriously ill. I think she had been crying."

"Poor thing! She has her hands full with that giddy sister of hers. Have you been to see them to-day, Christine?"

"No, mother. Mr. Vibert told me that it was no use my coming to him at present. The sitting-room is so near Miss Touchwood's bedroom that the sound of our voices disturbs her."

"We can but hope that it was this fever which was hanging about her and disturbed the balance of her mind when she behaved so foolishly a few days ago," said Mrs. Lingard, with dignity. "It is the best excuse I have heard made for her yet. My dear General, if you are ready, we had perhaps better start at once. The sun will be down before long."

It was her way of cutting short a conversation which was taking, as she considered, an undesirable turn. The General had offered to take her for a drive, and she had been drinking tea on the balcony beforehand with her family. When she had gone, Christine and Nell were left behind, with Jack Forrester, as usual in attendance.

"I don't care," Nell broke forth, as soon as her mother was well out of hearing. "I don't believe a word of it. I didn't much like Daisy Touchwood, but I am convinced that the things people say of her are untrue."

"We do not know the story, Nell dear, so perhaps we had better not discuss it," suggested Christine. She looked down as she spoke. There was no use in disguising the fact: she was relieved and brightened in spirit by the news that Gilbert was free. She was ashamed of

a feeling that seemed like triumph over a rival, but she could not help it ; and she cast down her eyes involuntarily when the subject was mentioned lest their new lustre should be remarked.

"I am *not* glad," she said to herself, over and over again. "I am sorry for her—sorry for him, too. She suffers ; and he has been mortified and distressed. Even if he did not love her, he must needs have suffered too. I am *not* glad." And yet it was hard to still the throbbing of the heart, although she repeated to herself that she had no business to be glad, as this change was not likely to have any important meaning for her. Since the day of that last interview in the shadow of the Pyramids, she had not had any private conversation with Greville. Even the short colloquy, during which Daisy had observed her, took place in the presence of Nell and Jack Forrester, who were sitting in the background. They had scarcely even glanced at each other : they had avoided one another as if by mutual consent. Christine had often told herself, with a jealous pain at her heart, that he was learning to care for Daisy, and that she was forgotten. All this was changed, he could not care for Daisy now ; but she shrank sensitively from even wishing him to say that he cared for *her*. Like Mrs. Lingard, she wanted to change the subject, but Nell was not prepared to let it drop.

"We know what people say !" she exclaimed indignantly. "We know that they say she ran away with that wretch Florian, and that Mrs. Vibert brought her back. Well, I don't believe it. She wasn't a double-faced girl, Christine : you have said yourself that she was given to displaying extreme candor."

Christine could not help smiling, and Jack Forrester laughed aloud.

"Right you are, Miss Lingard," he said. "She was a good sort on the whole. It was Mrs. Vibert who always

seemed anxious to get her own way, by any means, fair or foul. But Miss Touchwood was always very straight. I can't understand her going off with Florian, at all. I'm inclined to think there's some mistake about it."

Christine felt a sudden desire to reply sharply that there could be no mistake; but she repressed the impulse and addressed herself to an acquaintance who sat on a neighboring seat. The two young people, then left as it were together, at once lowered their voices, and drew closer to one another. Nell and Jack Forrester were by way of being very good friends.

"I am so glad you said that," Nell murmured confidentially. "I think everybody is very hard on poor Daisy Touchwood. She had a loud manner, you know, and was not always very nice; but I should say that she was very sincere."

"Yes, I think she was sincere," said Jack, meditatively; "and not at all the sort of girl to keep a secret. If she hadn't liked Gilbert Greville, you know, she would just have thrown him over; she wouldn't have gone out of her way to pretend and deceive and all that, you know."

"Exactly. And I think she—*liked* Captain Greville," said Nell, with a little pause before the emphasized word.

"Yes, I thought so. And in that case," said Jack, keeping his eyes on the girl's bright face, "she would have been true to him, wouldn't she?"

"Of course she would," said Nell, promptly.

"But you judge every one by yourself," said Mr. Forrester in a pensive tone. "Of course you would be true to the man you cared for—true to death."

"I suppose so," said Nell, rather shyly, and blushing a good deal.

"Lucky man!" sighed Jack.

There was a little pause; and then the young man

asked a really very impertinent question in a very humble tone,

"Has that lucky man come along yet, Nell?"

He had gained permission to call her Nell at intervals. "Once a week," she had saucily told him, he might address her by her Christian name. But he used the permission very frequently when he was alone with her.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Forrester."

"Ah, don't call me Mr. Forrester: it sounds so cold—as if you were offended with me," said Jack, beseechingly. "I only wanted to know whether there was any one whom you cared for."

"Lots of people," said Nell, with her chin in the air.

"I meant any particular man," said Jack, in the most insinuating of tones.

"A very rude question, I think."

"I did not mean it rudely: you know I did not. We are friends, good friends, and cousins in a sort of way. It is only that if there was any one in particular—it would be better for me to know."

"I don't see why," said Nell, smiling, and trying not to look conscious.

"Don't you? Then I'll tell you. I had better know, so that I may get out of your way, and try to forget you. There is not much chance of my forgetting you, but if any other fellow had come in the way, I suppose I should have to do my best."

Nell glanced involuntarily at Christine, but Christine, was very busy talking to her neighbor, and not attending to her sister at all. Then the girl affected not to hear or understand, and made some casual remark about a procession of camels that was just then passing along the road. But Jack would not be baulked in that way.

"Yes, it is an Arab wedding," he said, audaciously.

"The bridegroom is inside that sort of carriage thing on

the top of the camel! Nice red and gold trappings, haven't they? When I'm married, I wonder whether a wedding-breakfast and speeches will be worse than a ride in a cage on a camel all round Cairo! I'm not sure that I wouldn't prefer the Arab gentleman's lot."

"Wedding-breakfasts are out of fashion: you need not have one," said Nell.

"Well if you don't like them, I certainly won't have one. I shall always consult your tastes, you know."

"Mr. Forrester, what nonsense you talk."

"Nonsense? to talk of consulting your tastes—nonsense? I can only hope that you'll give me the chance of showing that it isn't nonsense at all. Don't you know that there is nothing I should care for half so much?"

His voice had grown so serious that Nell felt alarmed. It was a pleasant kind of alarm, but it made her face flush and her breath come faster, and she felt as though it were her duty to get up and go away. Nevertheless, she sat still, and Jack, watching her pretty blushing face, wondered whether he could keep silence any longer, or whether it were not almost too great a risk to utter the decisive words.

At that hour the balcony was not very full, but its emptiness made conversation all the more distinct. Jack was afraid to speak just yet.

"Come and look at those fly-switches that a man is offering for sale on the pavement," he said. "Don't you feel like buying one? I do."

The transaction of the fly-switches being ended, however, Jack showed no inclination to return to Christine's side. He leaned over the balustrade, and looked at the street, always full of strangely varied Oriental life, and Nelly stood beside him, slowly waving her fly-switch to and fro.

"I think," she said at last, with a little sigh, "that Cairo is the most beautiful city in the world."

"So it is—when you are in it," rejoined Jack.

"I wish," said Nell, with dignity, "that you would try to get out of the habit of making absurd compliments. They are of no value in themselves, and they only make you ridiculous."

"They are of value to me, because they relieve my feelings," said Jack, idly. "But I will talk seriously, if you like—without making any compliments at all. I have been wanting to talk to you seriously for some time."

"Don't!" she said, hastily backing out of her first position with a great lack of dignity. "I prefer the compliments; I do, indeed. It is not your *metier* to talk seriously."

"I hope you don't look upon me as a mere buffoon," said Jack, with real seriousness now.

"Of course not, but I like you to be amusing."

Jack suddenly stood erect, and turned towards her with a gravity which again almost frightened her.

"I can't be always amusing," he said, "and I know you better than to believe you would always like me to be so. I'm in deadly earnest now. I want to tell you that I love you, and I want you to be my wife."

He certainly looked earnest enough. Nell stole a glance at his face and then looked down again. Her face was towards the street, but the faces of the passers-by, the shops and gardens on the other side of the way, suddenly blended themselves in a bewildered mazy-colored haze. For a minute or two, she neither saw nor heard distinctly, but at last—out of the haze—Jack's face made itself clear.

"Can't you answer me, dear? Don't you care for me a little?"

"I think I do, Jack," she answered, smiling, though the

tears had, for some unexplained reason, welled up into her eyes.

His back was to the balustrade, and no one was very near. He possessed himself of one of her hands, and pressed it between both his own.

"My little darling! will you be my wife, then? Some day soon, Nell?"

"Oh, you must ask mother about that," said Nell, demurely.

"Why, Nelly," said Christine, an hour later, "I thought that you said nobody ought to think about these things until the age of twenty-five!"

"Did I ever talk such nonsense?" asked Nell, unblushingly. "I did not know any better, I suppose. You shouldn't bring up one's childish speeches in that way, Chris!"

"It was only six months ago?" said Christine. And then she smiled and sighed to think of the changes that six months had wrought.

Thus, while one girl had found her life's happiness in the old Mohammedan city, it had been to another—perhaps equally young and fair—the scene of her greatest loss, of a little commonplace heart-breaking tragedy, of which nobody but herself would ever know the beginning or the end. Daisy Touchwood was ill—seriously ill. She had had "a touch of fever" as people expressed it, on the day of her parting with Captain Greville, and from that time forth it had steadily increased. It was a kind of malarial fever, almost like typhoid, accompanied by great prostration of strength; and it had been rendered more serious than need have been by neglect. For at first the Viberts took little notice of Daisy's indisposition. Mr. Vibert openly declared that she was merely sulking;

and Evelyn was glad enough to keep out of her way. Only when she was found to be delirious, and unable to recognize her friends, did they send for a doctor; and when he came, they were rather indignant to find that he recommended her removal to the European hospital. "We can have a nurse here, and look after her ourselves," Evelyn had said, with a pang of sudden remorse.

But Mr. Vibert had over-ruled her. "I cannot have you making yourself ill for the sake of this troublesome girl, Evelyn," he said, solemnly. "And besides it may be something infectious, who knows? It would not be dealing fairly with the hotel people to give them the trouble of a fever patient in the house. She will be better nursed by the sisters in the German hospital than she would be here."

So Daisy was taken away in the stupor and semi-delirium of fever, to the hospital, where she was at least tended by kindly women, who knew nothing of her story, and who said soothing words to her when she was conscious, and ministered to all her bodily wants with tenderness and skill. Yet she did not improve; and to all inquiries, nurses and doctors would reply that the fever must run its course, and that she would do very well if they could keep up her strength.

Keep up her strength! But that was the difficulty. For the girl seemed to have no hold on life: she had little vitality, the doctors said, and she would not make any effort. She did what she was told to do, with passive obedience; but she was difficult to rouse, and seemed uneasy and depressed in mind. "There is some trouble weighing on her," said one of the doctors to Mrs. Vibert, when that lady appeared one day to spend ten minutes in her sister's room; "if you know any way of relieving it, you would do her more good than I can."

He was a shrewd, kindly man, and he knew something

of Daisy's history. He noted that Mrs. Vibert grew a shade paler as he spoke.

"She was engaged, and the engagement has been broken off lately," said Evelyn. "I think she was distressed about it."

"Possibly," said the doctor. "I was wondering whether you—as her sister—could comfort or pacify her in any way. If she thinks that you have disapproved of her actions, for instance,—she may be fretting over some fancied coldness or displeasure——"

He knew more of the story than Evelyn thought. She flushed all over and turned abruptly away.

"Daisy does not care what I think of her actions—I can safely say that," she remarked, in an ironical tone, which sounded curiously out of place to the doctor's ears. "I know of nothing that I can do or say to please her."

He opened the door for her as she swept out of the room, with her chin at its haughtiest angle, and looked after her with a knitted brow.

"Not much love for her sister," he reflected. "I suppose it is true that the girl did make a fool of herself in one way or another, and her family can't forgive it. Poor child! I am afraid it will go hard with her."

He shook his head as he went back to Daisy's room, and looked at her fever-flushed face and dim, glazed eyes. He felt sorry for her and angry with the sister who could so callously leave her to suffer and perhaps to die.

Evelyn was not quite so callous as she looked. She was nervously afraid just now of displeasing her husband, and he had almost forbidden her to visit Daisy at the hospital. It was with great reluctance, and chiefly for appearance' sake, that he allowed her to spend ten minutes a day with her sister; and after each visit she was ordered by him to drive for an hour or an hour and a half by way of disinfecting herself. Not that Daisy's complaint was of an in-

fectious nature : but Mr. Vibert had a general idea that all hospitals were centres of contamination. So Evelyn drove about the streets and along the Ghizeereh road, looking lovely and perfectly irreproachable, while her heart was torn and racked by conflicting emotions and her conscience smote her with keen sharp strokes of an undying remorse.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR. HOSKINS TO THE RESCUE !

CHRISTINE's duties with Mr. Vibert had ended in the natural course of things. It was not very easy to keep up any continuous system of study in the midst of a city that claims to be as gay as Monte Carlo itself, and it was difficult for Christine to give him her time when her relations were present. Her position was changed from the moment of their first appearance ; for the General and Mrs. Lingard were alike scandalized at the idea of her working for money, and did their best to make her relinquish her employment. She persevered for a time, with indifferent success, but at last was forced to yield to her mother's solicitations, and persisted only in reading to Mr. Vibert sometimes for pleasure and not for pay. Her time was thus very much at her own disposal, and she was quite disengaged when she heard one morning that Mr. Hoskins was very anxious to see her, and was waiting for her on the balcony.

She went out to him—the balcony was a supplementary drawing-room, with which they could ill dispense—but a breath of hot air almost drove her back when she reached the door. It was a *khamseen*—a hot wind-day, and the outside air was fierce and still, as if it were but the mouth of

a furnace. Inside the house the temperature was lower, but the room felt close, for the shutters and doors were closed to keep out the scorching desert-wind. Christine found a quiet corner in the drawing-room and waited to hear what Mr. Hoskins wished to say.

She was a little startled by his appearance. He was white and wild, his eyes were bloodshot, his hair was dishevelled, and his attire bore marks of disorder. It was as yet early in the day, and there seemed no reason for these marks of haste and agitation; but they were sufficiently explained when, in a trembling voice, the young man began to speak.

"You are surprised to see me like this, Miss Lingard. I've been up all night. I walked all the way to the Pyramids and back by way of working off my restlessness. I have not known what to do with myself."

"What is it? I hope Miss Touchwood is not worse," said Christine, with concern. She had long been the recipient of the little man's hopes and fears with regard to Daisy.

"I don't know—she is very ill. Miss Lingard, you know how I love her! You know that I would do anything to serve her. I told her so the other day—the very day when her engagement was broken off: I begged her to marry me—and I'm sure I could have made her happy."

"You asked her to marry you—after——" Then Christine stopped short, knowing that she ought not to have said so much. But although she had not completed the sentence, Mr. Hoskins understood the astonishment in her tone.

"After she had acted with the greatest generosity and courage and devotion in the world!" he cried, with sudden enthusiasm. "Anybody might be proud to have her for his wife, after that! Yes, I know what I am saying, Miss Lingard; and it is for that very reason that I've

come to you now. I have heard—from several sources—that there are stories—strange stories about Miss Touchwood. I can contradict them all—every one!”

“Why do you come to me, Mr. Hoskins?” said Christine, gently but with some coldness.

“Because you will understand, because you will sympathize, said the young man, vehemently. “You were always good to me when I told you of my troubles: I come to you now to help *her*—the woman I love—not because I love her, but because you are a woman too, a good woman, and a kind one, willing to help those who are in need.”

Mr. Hoskins’ sudden volubility almost alarmed Christine. She wondered whether he had not over-exerted himself, and got “a touch of the sun.” Perhaps he read the doubt of his perfect sanity in her eyes, for his manner at once became much quieter.

“Look here, Miss Lingard,” he said, with great earnestness, “you know how I love her, and how dear her happiness is to me. When I heard that her engagement to Captain Greville was broken off, I asked her if I ought not to tell the truth to him and to others. I thought it might make some difference. Perhaps she did not understand me: at any rate she said that I need not do anything of that kind. But it was because people spoke ill of her, was it not? People tell me so, and I *must* know.”

“I suppose that it was,” Christine answered. She scarcely understood her own reluctance to answer.

“She made me promise to be silent. She said that if I told the truth she would never speak to me again. I did not see then what she meant—I had no idea that she was sacrificing herself, and I promised. Surely it would be right for me to break that promise now? I have come to ask you, Miss Lingard, what I ought to do.”

"Mr. Hoskins, I really cannot tell what you mean. You have not explained—and I do not understand."

"I *will* explain," said the young man, making a violent effort to restrain the distress which had hitherto caused him to be almost unintelligible. "When Miss Daisy spoke to me about her broken engagement, I believed what she told me, that she and Captain Greville were not suited to one another and so on. But since that day I have heard other things, I have heard a story with which Cairo is said to be ringing; and I know—I *know*—that it is not true."

"If you know this, Mr. Hoskins, it is your duty to say so."

"I have not known how to act. Her illness has made everything more difficult. And last night, I managed to see Dr. Fanshawe, who attends her, and I got him to tell me how she really was. The fever has almost gone, he says, but she is so weak that they are doubtful whether she can pull through. If she were happy, he says, she would have a so much better chance. But there's something at work—something on her mind that won't let her rest, won't let her be at peace, something which makes her not wish to live. I've been half desperate since I heard it. Because I believe I know what is wrong—and yet I don't know how to put things right."

"Surely nothing is easier than to tell the true story if there is anything to tell," said Christine. As yet the young man's appeal had left her cold.

"It is not easy if it involves the ruin and condemnation of another woman," said Hoskins, in a lower tone. "And it was to save that woman that Daisy has sacrificed herself—am I to break my promise and make her sacrifice of no avail."

"Is not that a rather overstrained view of things?" Christine asked. "Is there no middle course? How has Daisy sacrificed herself?"

"It was for her sister," said Mr. Hoskins, drawing closer, and speaking in the lowest possible tones. "It was Mrs. Vibert who tried to run away with the man Florian, and it was Daisy who stopped it and brought her back."

"Mr. Hoskins ! It is not possible !"

"Miss Lingard, I and Miss Touchwood were an hour in Cairo streets, looking everywhere for Mrs. Vibert that night. She had disappeared from the hotel, and Daisy started in search of her. She was in terrible distress about her sister. I met her just outside the hotel, and went with her to the Continental, where we heard that Mr. Lingard, as he called himself, had gone to the railway station. We took a carriage and drove there, and she ran along the platform looking in at the windows, until she saw this man and her sister. The train was just moving but she struggled into the carriage—he trying to push her away and force her down upon the platform again. I myself thought she would be killed. *He* did not want her you may depend on that. But she got in at last, and went on to Alexandria—and brought her sister back."

"But, Mr. Hoskins ! Do you mean to say that she never said a word to explain—to justify herself ?"

"Not a word. She asked me not to say anything about it. I cannot understand how Mrs. Vibert has the heart—but it seems that she has put the blame on her sister's shoulders, and would let her die sooner than bear it herself."

"Oh, I can believe anything of Mrs. Vibert," said Christine. "But this is shameful !—And that poor girl—every one speaking ill of her, in disgrace with her relations, and she never saying a single word out of love for her sister !—It was noble of her—noble ; and we have misjudged her so !"

There was wonder as well as regret and self-accusation.

in her tone. At one time nothing could have made her believe that she could ever find anything admirable in Daisy Touchwood's behavior.

"Yes ; nobody understood her : I always said so," the young man cried eagerly. "Have I not said to you that she was as generous and good as she was beautiful ? She has thrown away all her happiness—broken off her engagement, allowed herself to be maligned and evil spoken of, all to save her sister whom she loved ! I don't know what any saint or heroine could do more."

"But we must save her, Mr. Hoskins," said Christine, her eyes kindling and the color rising in her face. "We can't let this go on. How *could* you keep silence so long ? But of course it was difficult for you."

"It is difficult still," said he, with a distressed face. "I have broken my solemn promise in order to tell you. Now you must make what use of your knowledge you choose. I leave it in your hands."

"But, Mr. Hoskins, you must support me. You will have to be ready to tell your story if called upon. Besides—" with a little hesitation—"I do not quite know what to do. We cannot undo all that she has done. We cannot accuse Mrs. Vibert to her husband. It would mean far worse misfortune to her than to poor Daisy, after all. What is to be done ?"

"I thought," said Hoskins, dejectedly, "that you would have some plan to propose, Miss Lingard. I am afraid that my little ideas won't amount to much. All that I thought was that you would—for a beginning—tell the story, under promise of secrecy, to Captain Greville, so that he might let her know that he trusted her and did not believe anything against her. That would do her more good than anything else, I'm sure ; for she loves Captain Greville, and she is dying not so much of fever, Miss Lingard, as of a broken heart."

"Dying! she is not dying!" said Christine, almost indignantly.

"If she did not rally soon, the doctor said that she would have no chance. If she hears that Greville trusts and loves her still, why then, she might pluck up heart to live—at least, I think so. And if she is to die—why, for God's sake, let her die happy."

"And if she lives?"

"If she lives, as I pray God she will," said Hoskins, his pale face aglow with the inspiration of a generous hope, "then Captain Greville must marry her, and show to all the world that the stories which are told against her are not true. And with a husband to back her up, and friends to stand by her bravely, as I am sure you would do, the scandal will die away of itself, without even a slur on Mrs. Vibert's memory. Because, you will understand, Miss Lingard, that it would give no happiness to Daisy Touchwood if we vindicated *her* at her sister's expense."

"Yes, you are right, Mr. Hoskins: Daisy has a good friend in you," said Christine, softly. She rose and gave him her hand, with an impulse of new-born respect for the man who, shy, ungainly, provincial in some ways, as he was, had nevertheless proved himself at need so capable a defender of the girl he loved. "And now," she said, after enduring the rather painful squeeze of her fingers which in his agitation the young minister bestowed on her, "we must think what is to be done. There is no time to be lost, if she is so ill and—poor girl—so unhappy. You will go to Captain Greville?"

Hoskins' face fell. "I have been to him already," he said, "and he refuses to listen."

"Refuses to listen!"

"He said that he could not discuss Miss Touchwood with any one: he declined to hear anything in the nature

of explanation : he seemed to think that I was insulting him by offering any. Miss Lingard, you are a friend of his : that is another reason why I came to you—you will make him hear, will you not ? ”

“ I ? But I—it is not my place ! ”

“ If you will not do it, whom shall I go to ? ”

Christine was silent.

“ Miss Lingard, you won’t refuse ! Even if it is difficult—think what *she* has undergone, and pity her.”

For a moment Christine’s heart swelled within her. “ Even if it is difficult : ”—was it not difficult ? was it not the hardest thing in the world for her to do ? To go to Gilbert and give him reasons for binding himself anew to the woman whom he did *not* love, and who seemed scarcely capable (so Christine could not help thinking) of rising even once to those heights of self-abnegation, on which poor Mr. Hoskins believed her whole life to be spent ! And yet—was it not common justice ? And could she let Daisy live or die under a cloud which she could by a word or two remove ?

She did not even think of the petulance and incivility to which Daisy had so often treated her in the days gone by. She did think with terror of the prospect before her—of the fate that made her the one to clasp these broken fetters on Gilbert’s hands once more. But honor and duty bade her act, and she would not flinch from what was required of her.

She turned to Hoskins after that one moment’s hesitation.

“ I will speak to Captain Greville,” she said, “ if you will tell me where he is to be found.”

“ I ascertained,” said Hoskins, eagerly, “ that he would be at home to lunch, and disengaged during the afternoon. If you wrote a note to him—perhaps ? I could leave it for you at his quarters——”

"Oh, Mr. Hoskins, you really ought not to run about the town in this weather. You will get a sunstroke."

"The sun does not hurt me : it really does not. Nothing hurts me that I do for her. And he might see her if he went to the hospital at sunset—it would do her good to see him—she would be better then," said Hoskins, turning his grief-stricken hollow eyes towards Miss Lingard so piteously that she stood abashed. After all, she reflected, this man's love was more generous than her own. Was it from Daisy, whom she had scorned, and Nathaniel Hoskins whom she had laughed at, that she was to learn self-sacrifice? She bowed her head with a new humility at the thought.

She wrote a note to Captain Greville, and prepared herself for the interview, which she knew would be a difficult one. Indeed, she had very slight hopes of success. But she would try to make him listen to the truth. And in the meantime, she made certain inquiries on her own account.

He came at the hour she had named, and seemed pleased, if a little bit puzzled, by her invitation. The hot wind was still blowing, and Christine ventured an apology for having brought him out in the heat.

"I go out in all weathers, even in *khamseens*," he said, with a laugh. "But you have been out too, I see."

"Yes, I have been to the hospital."

"Indeed?"—There was a momentary stiffening at once.

"To see Miss Touchwood—and her doctor."

"Very kind of you, I am sure," said Gilbert, formally ; then, with sudden anxiety, "I hope you did not go into her room? They say it is not exactly an infectious fever ; still, you ought to be careful."

"I took all necessary precautions, but I went into her room. She was barely conscious, but I think that some-

thing I said roused her a little. Captain Greville, I did a rash thing—you may think, perhaps, an unjustifiable thing. I promised that you would go to see her.”

Captain Greville was standing. Involuntarily he straightened his shoulders, as if to receive a shock. His face was carefully guarded : it betrayed no feeling at all.

“ I am quite sure,” he said, slowly, “ that you would not do anything that would land me in an unpleasant or compromising situation, but you must see that I have no right to visit Miss Touchwood—especially without the consent of her relatives.”

“ You will have the authorization of her doctor,” said Christine quickly, “ and I am sure that Mrs. Vibert will make no objection, if the circumstances are put before her. Captain Greville, I am very much afraid that that poor girl is dying. And she wants to see you—I think—perhaps—you can imagine why.”

There was a short silence. Greville, in a very erect attitude, stood looking out of the window. “ If it is as you say,” he remarked, in measured tones, “ I am extremely sorry ; but I really do not see what good my visiting her will do. How can I alter what has happened ? What could I say to her if I saw her ? ”

“ You could say to her,” said Christine, “ that you know now that you judged her harshly ; that you did not—perhaps—believe her word ; that you know her better now and honor her for her attempt to save—another.”

“ But—I do not know all this ! How can I say so ? Is this another version of the extraordinary tale with which Hoskins came to see me this morning ? Let me entreat of you not to make yourself a party to any imposture.”

He spoke briefly and sternly, but Christine was not afraid, although her eyes filled with tears.

"It is no imposture," she said. "The story that Mr. Hoskins came to tell you this morning is, I believe, perfectly true. At any rate, you must listen to it—you will listen to it, will you not?"

Again Greville was silent. He looked at Christine at last, with softened but steady eyes, and said gently—

"For your sake, Christine, I will hear."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"PROMISE ME!"

It was in a darkened room, carefully screened from light and shut in from the scorching heat of day, that Daisy Touchwood was lying. After a peculiarly hot and trying day, a cooler wind had risen, bringing a little relief in its train. And as the light waned, and the breeze sprang up, the nurses allowed their patient to see a visitor who had anxiously awaited their summons for some little while.

To the eyes of this visitor, there was indeed a terrible change in the young girl's face. He had scarcely believed the report that she was in danger: it had not seemed possible to him that a few days should suffice to smite down a young, vigorous life and drain its strength away. The girl's blue eyes looked larger than ever in her wan little face. The fever-flush had left her, and there were blue shadows round her eyes and mouth, and a white, pinched appearance of the features, which told an ominous tale to those who could read the signs. Greville, whom the nurse had brought to her bedside, did not need the word of caution that she addressed to him. He had seen death in other faces and he saw it now. It was

with a moved heart, that he bent over the little white bed, and called the girl by her name.

"Daisy, my dear," he said, "do you know me?"

The blue eyes, over which the lids drooped languidly, suddenly opened wide, and a gleam of new life and consciousness came into them. She moved her hand a little, and Greville gently took it in his own.

"Gilbert!" Then, with an effort, and a whitening lip—"Captain Greville, I mean."

"No, my dear, Gilbert. Call me Gilbert if you like—and if you will."

She roused herself a little more. "But why? how is it? Why have you come?"

"I have come, dear, to tell you that I understand. That I believe you. That I ask your forgiveness for ever having doubted you."

He spoke softly, but clearly. The nurse was in the room, but he did not care. His own abasement, his vindication of her truth and uprightness, should be as complete and as perfect as he could make it. But for his reluctance to undo Daisy's hard-wrought work and to sully her sister's name, he would have proclaimed the true story to all the world. Christine had fulfilled her task nobly; and Gilbert understood Daisy now.

"But what does that mean?" said the girl, in her low, weak tones. A great terror and anxiety came into her great blue eyes as she spoke. "Who has been talking to you—and where—where is Evelyn?"

"She is safe enough," Gilbert answered, with a touch of scorn.

"Really—really safe? But—you—know?"

"Yes, my dear, I know. Don't be afraid; I will guard her secret. Daisy, why couldn't you trust me?"

"I was afraid. I knew you were so honorable—so strict—I was afraid you would not let me do it."

"I think we might have devised something else—something to screen your sister, and yet prevent you from taking the whole burden on your shoulders. My poor little girl! It was very brave of you, Daisy—very good. I don't know that she has been worth the sacrifice."

Daisy lay looking at him: a little smile crept to the corners of her lips, though her eyes were troubled still.

"Gilbert," she said, "you understand everything, don't you? You know I was only looking for her, and trying to bring her back?"

"Yes, yes, my child. I understand."

His heart was full of a great pity for her. He had never given her so much tenderness before—never felt for her before any emotion that so nearly resembled that of love.

"And you will help me to keep the secret? You won't tell it to Gervase—not even when I am dead?"

"I will tell nobody, my dear; but I will let everybody know how much I love and honor you; and people will soon leave off talking scandal when they see you my loved and honored wife."

He spoke quite steadily and calmly: there was a look of purpose which had ceased to be painful upon his manly face. He would keep the old promise that he had made, if Daisy lived, and it seemed to him now a less arduous task than it had seemed formerly. At least, if he could not give his wife all the love that was hers by right, he could give her an affection that was founded upon esteem. Underneath the frivolous exterior that had once repelled him, he had found a heart, a conscience, and a soul.

"Will you kiss me?" she said, simply.

He bent his lips to hers, and one wasted hand stole softly round his neck. She held him there for a minute or two, and then said, in a still lower tone,

"I shall never be your wife, you know. I am going to die—very soon. That is why I asked you to kiss me. I would not have asked, if I had been going to live; because—you know, Gilbert—you don't love me."

"My dear little one, don't talk in that way. I do love you, and the more I know of you, the dearer you are to me. It was that distrust of mine that makes you think so. You don't know how ashamed I am of myself."

"No, it isn't that," said Daisy, quietly releasing him. "It's because I have thought over a great many things while I have been lying here, and I know the truth now. You will be ever so much happier without me. And it's all right for me; for now I know that you trust me, I don't care about anything else. And—I don't think I can talk any more just now."

She sank back exhausted, and the nurse, coming forward, signified to Greville that he had better go. Truth to tell, he could not have said much more, for he was half-choked with grief, and remorse, and pity, as he looked at the wan face and heard those last languidly-spoken words. He kissed her again, but his heart was too full for speech.

"Don't grieve," she found strength to say, looking into his dimmed eyes with the preternatural keenness of sight sometimes possessed by those who are near to death; "I'm all right. And you will come again, will you not?"

He would have sat at her door night and day if such attendance would have availed her: he would almost have laid his own life down if the sacrifice could have lengthened out her days. He had misjudged her cruelly: he had inflicted untold suffering on that faithful little heart; and his conscience smote him for what he had done. Like many men, he had held a theory that women were selfish, and would willingly sacrifice each other, where their love or their vanity were concerned; but here, be-

fore his eyes, were two women, one of whom sacrificed her good name and her lover's opinion of her in order to keep her sister's reputation unsullied, while the second chose to vindicate her rival's character and send the man she loved to make every reparation in his power to the girl who had always striven to injure her. To Greville, it was an overpowering revelation of the goodness and the generosity of women, and he stood abashed and ashamed before it.

When Christine had made him understand all that had really happened, he had been overwhelmed, first by amaze, and then by a generous contrition which thought no amends too great for the girl whom he had wronged in his heart by base suspicions. There had been no question between him and Christine as to what he should do. He must tell Daisy that he had been unjust to her, and ask her again to be his wife. No thought of taking any mean advantage of the breaking of the engagement ever occurred to either of them. He had cast off Daisy Touchwood because of a slander, and he was ready to fulfil his promise to her as soon as the slander was proved untrue. Mr. Hoskins' testimony completely exonerated her, and Greville bitterly blamed himself for misunderstanding the purity and candor of Daisy's character.

With his regret was mingled a fierce anger against Mrs. Vibert. He knew that out of respect to Daisy, his lips were sealed: he could not venture to inform Gervase Vibert that his wife had run away from him, and had been brought back only by the exertions of the fragile girl whose character had been sacrificed in order to save her sister from ruin. Greville felt no compassion for Evelyn, but for Daisy's sake he meant to hold his tongue before the world. If ever he found the opportunity of speaking, however, he did not mean to be silent to Evelyn herself.

The opportunity of speech was very speedily afforded him. He was leaving the hospital, when he saw that a

carriage stood at the door. Mrs. Vibert had just descended from it, and he met her face to face.

He would rather not have spoken at that moment. He knew that he was not master of himself: he was as yet too deeply indignant to speak with the calm contempt which he would have chosen to show her at another time; but he could not escape. She looked him full in the face, and seemed to challenge him to do his worst.

"Captain Greville," she said, "I hear that you have been to see my sister. May I ask on whose authority you were admitted? I should think that you were the last person she wished to see."

Captain Greville lifted his hat in bitter mockery. "I am quite aware, madam, that I am the last person you wished her to see," he said.

She looked more intently at his pale, set face, and saw in a moment what had happened. She had hitherto shown little token of fear or anxiety: her attire was costly and perfect, her cheek blooming, her chin proudly raised, her bearing arrogant. But now her face paled, and she slightly drew back.

"Your engagement to her is broken off," she said in a hard voice. "I see no reason why you should be here."

"My engagement to your sister has been renewed," said Greville, coldly. "It was broken off through a misunderstanding simply. I did not appreciate the truth and generosity of her character, nor understand how far malice and wickedness had been at work." He paused for an instant, observing the fading of the color from her cheeks and lips, then added significantly. "I do not know how far you can make amends for what you have done, Mrs. Vibert, but I should advise you very strongly to confess your crime and take the consequences."

"Crime!" She laid one hand again the door-post to steady her trembling limbs, and glanced at him furtively.

No one but an Arab servant was beside them, and she dared therefore to speak. "I really do not understand you, Captain Greville."

"Do you not?" said Greville, scornfully. "Your memory seems to be short. Shall I refresh it by an account of the evening when you undertook an expedition to Alexandria?"

Evelyn's face was livid. It was evident now that she had rouged before coming out, for the artificial color showed itself with startling distinctness on the ghastly pallor of her complexion. She lost her self-command.

"You know—you know—Daisy has told you!" she gasped out.

"I know—all," said Greville, sternly. "But it is not Daisy who has told. *She* would have guarded your secret to the death, Mrs. Vibert. No, it was some one else who knew the truth and told it. Perhaps one knowledge of the truth, and one indignation at the wickedness of your conduct, will teach you a little of the shame which you have so far seemed incapable of feeling."

She shrank away from him, and leaned against the wall. He thought that she was about to faint, but her condition roused no pity in him: he could hardly have pitied her if she had lain upon the rack.

But she did not faint. She opened her white lips and spoke.

"You mean—to let—everybody know?" she said.

It was the one dread that possessed her. There was no feeling for Daisy—only for herself. Greville turned on his heel contemptuously.

"I shall keep your secret—for Daisy's sake," he said. "You are safe from me. I can only hope that you will live to repent of your treachery to your husband, and your cruelty to your sister. It is for her sake only that I do not expose you. You may be thankful that she has

lived : you ought to grieve indeed when she has passed away. She will not be here very long to bear the burden of your sins, poor child ! ”

Then he left her. More words would have been impossible to him : the very sight of Evelyn Vibert had become intolerable. He strode away into the gathering twilight, and Evelyn was left alone.

She stood for a little while longer, leaning against the wall. She was very much shaken : she had had a terrible fright, but the relief she felt when Greville promised not to betray her had a reviving power. She did not care very much for his reproaches. The only thing that impressed her was his expression of belief that Daisy was going to die. That, she told herself, was impossible. Of course Daisy would get better, and she would henceforward be good and kind to her. It would be ridiculous to think that Daisy—only nineteen years old—would die ! ”

There was something in Evelyn’s face when next she bent over Daisy’s pillow that caught the girl’s eye. She looked beseechingly into Mrs. Vibert’s face.

“ I couldn’t help it, Evie dear,” she said. “ I did not tell him, you know.”

“ It’s all right,” Evelyn answered, in a hard voice. “ He says he will keep the secret. Who told him ? ”

“ Mr. Hoskins, I believe. He came with me to the station, that night.”

“ If I had been told that, I might have known that it would be all over Cairo directly.”

“ No, Evelyn, no. They have promised me not to say a word. Even when I’m gone, they will be silent : I know they will.”

“ Don’t talk about being ‘ gone,’ child—it is absurd,” said Evelyn, with something of her old petulance. Her face softened as she looked at her sister’s white face, and with a sudden movement of shame and penitence, which

was only too transient, she laid her head on the pillow beside it. "Oh, Daisy, Daisy, what should I do without you?"

A gush of tears followed, and a passionate sob or two. Daisy stroked her sister's cheek gently, but did not say anything, and the nurse, who was passing in and out to see that all went well, made a step towards the bed as though to stop the too exciting conversation. But it did not take long for Evelyn to collect herself again. She drew herself up, wiped her tears away, and sat silent, with her hand clasped in Daisy's feeble fingers. Seeing the sisters so quiet and composed, the nurse went away again, and for some time there was a silence in the room.

At last Daisy spoke. "Evelyn, will you promise me something?"

"That depends. If I can, I will."

"You *can*—if you will."

"Tell me what it is," said Evelyn. Her eyes were haggard and the color in her cheeks, half rubbed off by tears, gave her a terrible look of premature decay and misery. For once she was careless of appearances: she had forgotten how she looked.

"I want you to promise not to leave Gervase again, even if you are tempted," said the failing voice. "He has been good to you—he was good to me—Evie, won't you promise to be good to him?"

"It is more likely that he will order me out of the house some day, than that I shall run away from him," said Evelyn, with a ghastly pretence at a laugh.

"Promise me, Evelyn dear."

She hesitated for a moment. "I am not likely to have the temptation," she said, a little sullenly.

"But you will promise me, Evie?"

"Oh, well, if you won't be content without it—I promise. But Daisy, Daisy, get better and help me, for you know

my life *is* hard—and—and I never meant to be cruel to you, darling, so get better—for my sake.”

It was the old cry ; but even for “ Evelyn’s sake,” Daisy could not this time promise to do what her sister wanted. The end was now in higher hands than hers.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“ DELIVER US FROM EVIL.”

THERE was a consultation between doctor and nurses that night as to whether Mrs. Vibert should be apprised of her sister’s condition of danger and asked to remain with her. The doctor wished this to be done, while the nurses, more keenly alive to Evelyn’s want of tenderness and sympathy, declared that it would be useless to ask Mrs. Vibert to stay, and that she would do the patient more harm than good, if she did.

It was plain to them now that Daisy would not rally. She was sinking from day to day, growing weaker from hour to hour. At times she lay almost insensible, seemingly at death’s door : then again she revived and was animated by a flash of feverish eagerness for the faces and voices of those she loved. At first they tried to check these fits of unnatural energy, each of which was succeeded by deeper depression than before ; but at last there came a time when the doctors said quietly that she might do as she liked. Nothing could hurt her more : for no hope remained.

She herself seemed conscious of the true state of things. She took the prospect of death very calmly. There was nothing in it to harm her. Some sort of belief in the

Unseen had always lurked in the background of her gay and frivolous young life ; and it gathered intensity when the entrance upon a new world drew near. She said little about herself, her hopes and fears, however : it was only by her perfect calm—which might be only the calm of weakness—that the on-lookers, gathered that she was not afraid. She accepted the ministrations of the chaplain with gentleness and gratitude, but she did not respond to them freely. Perhaps she had a difficulty in putting her feelings into words.

She asked for Gilbert more than once, and he was always ready to come when he was off duty. Indeed, he found that he had an unusual amount of time at his disposal. His superior officers had heard the story—as, by this time, so had every Englishman in Cairo—and were touched by it. Of course nobody knew the truth, and there was a good deal that puzzled the gossips in the telling of the tale, but even the most superficial version had pathos in it. Whether Daisy had, or had not eloped with Florian, nobody was sure ; but by this time, the rumor was current, that, although she had gone to Alexandria with him, she had not done so by her own free will : she had been tricked into it, and then Gilbert had quarrelled with her about it, and broken off the engagement ; whereon she had fretted herself ill, and was now dying of a broken heart, while Greville, now deeply repentant of his harshness, was doing his utmost to make amends.

This was the version of the story most current and most believed ; and it showed that the tide of feeling had turned, and was running in Daisy's favor.

The Cairo people showed their recovered kindness by besieging the hospital with inquiries, cards, and presents of fruit and flowers for Miss Touchwood. Daisy took a simple pleasure in hearing of these visits and gifts. She

kept the cards on a little light tray near her bed, and fingered them now and then with evident satisfaction.

"They have not cut me after all, you see," she said, with childish complacency to Greville one day.

"Why should they, dear?"

"Oh, Gervase said they would, you know. Here's Lady B——'s card, and the Menteiths'. Lady Menteith sent me some lovely flowers yesterday, and the General himself drove up and left some fruit from his wife this morning. The Archdeacon came last night. None of those people would look at me when I was well—even before all that trouble, you know; but they are kind, when one is ill."

"Yes, dear, of course."

"Do you remember the ball at the Citadel? Wasn't it—ripping?"

"It was a very good ball," said Greville. He noticed that Daisy's little slang phrases did not vex him now. Poor child! what trifling shortcomings of hers they had been which vexed him in the olden days! And what a heart of gold lay behind the worst of her shortcomings.

"We had a good time, hadn't we?" said Daisy. "I'm rather sorry to think—I shall never dance any more."

Greville put his lips to the hot little fingers which he held. He could not express sympathy better. Daisy smiled and lay still.

"Gilbert," she said, after a long pause, "was it Mr. Hoskins who came to you about that—that journey to Alexandria?"

Gilbert hesitated. He did not like to tell her all the truth. But she insisted.

"I want to know about it," she said. "I think you might tell me. I suppose you did not want to listen to him at first, and thought he was interfering. Tell me about it all."

So he told her, keeping fast hold of her hand meanwhile.

"Miss Lingard!" she repeated, when he had done. "Miss Lingard!" And then she lay silent, with a perplexed and troubled look on her face.

"You don't mind that, do you, dear?" he asked, unable to bear her very quietness.

"No, I don't think so," she said, gently. "But—I don't understand. I thought she hated me—I did indeed. I was never nice to her, Gilbert. I'm sorry now."

"She was very sorry that we should have done you any injustice, Daisy. Hoskins knew what he was doing when he went to her."

"It was good of her," said Daisy, with a wistful look in her blue eyes. "I wonder if she would come to see me."

"I am sure she would. She has said she wished you would let her come."

Daisy gave him a quick glance, then turned her head away for a minute or two. "I should like her to come," she said, presently, in a quiet voice. "Will you ask her when you see her again, please?"

"I will, dear."

"And, Gilbert, there is something I want to tell you. You won't be angry?"

"Angry, my dear little girl!"

"Well—vexed or disappointed, I mean. You have said sometimes that I seemed a—a sort of truthful person——"

"The soul of truth and honor, I believe, Daisy!"

"But I am not. You are mistaken in me. That is what I want to tell you. I deceived you—once—specially."

"Never mind, now, dear."

"But I do mind. Do you remember when we missed the train at Helouan?"

"Yes, you had hurt your foot."

"That's just it. I hurt it—a little. It came into my head to pretend that it was worse than it was, and to make it an excuse for missing the train."

"It was simply an idle bit of mischief, then. Never mind," said Greville, tenderly. "Why rake up an old memory like that?"

"It was more than mischief," said Daisy. "I wanted you to ask me to be your wife, Gilbert. I never thought I should tell you. But I don't mind now. You must try and forgive me for it if you can. I know very well that you didn't love me; but I cared for you, you know, and I thought that in time you would care for me."

"You have made me care for you already, dear."

"Yes, but not in the right way—not in the right way," said the girl, dreamily; and then she held his hand and looked up into his face with an air of complete absorption which kept him silent. "I think I'm glad I'm going away," she went on, with the perfect simplicity that always characterized her references to death, "because I think you will be happier without me; and—then—I don't think I should care again for the old things I used to like, if I got better. Even dancing—you know—and the things one thought good fun—like smoking, and flirting—and talking slang and going to the races—and new dresses—and all that, I don't think I should care for it all over again. I want something new. Do you think I shall get it, where I am going?"

"I think you will be happy, dear, wherever you go."

"Well, perhaps so," said Daisy, with a great sigh. "I haven't been very happy here lately, somehow. Things have been so—so—unsatisfactory."

She was too tired to say much more, but before Gilbert left her, she repeated her desire that Christine should come and see her "very soon."

Christine came on the following day. She had been nervous and distressed at the idea of seeing Daisy again, but when she glanced at the dying girl's wasted face, a great compassion filled her heart, and all bitterness of feeling died at once and forever. She sat down quietly by the bedside and waited for Daisy to open her eyes and look at her. She had not to wait very long. The girl smiled at her and put out her hand.

"So you've come to say good-bye?" she said. "I'm glad to see you again. I wanted to thank you for what you did. You made Gilbert believe in me again. It was good of you."

"How could I do anything else?" said Christine. Then after a moment's pause: "I have a message for you from my sister Nell. She wishes me to give you her love. She thought you would not mind her sending it, although she never knew you very well."

"Thank you. I should like to send her my love too. Does she—does she—think very badly of me?"

"Nobody thinks badly of you now, dear. And Nell—I may tell you that she would never believe a word against you: not even when some people were saying unkind things."

A sudden light came into Daisy's eyes. "Oh, I am so glad!" she murmured. "It is so nice to think that one person believed in me, at any rate."

"Yes, she was right, and we were all wrong. You will forgive us, Daisy, will you not?"

"It was quite natural. There was nothing to forgive," said Daisy, and then she was silent for a little while. Then there was a touch of her old abruptness in her tones when she spoke again. "You will not tell anybody what you know, will you?"

"Never."

"Thank you. And there is just one other thing I want

to say—I can't talk much—at a time, you know; but there is just one thing——”

“Shall I go away and come again?” asked Christine, struck afresh by the whiteness of the girl's face, the shadows round her eyes, and the shortness of her breath. But Daisy shook her head.

“No, I would rather speak now. There's no knowing—I mayn't have another chance. It's about Gilbert.”

Christine's heart beat faster, but she showed no signs of discomfort or agitation. Daisy went on, with the great blue eyes still fastened on Christine's face.

“I loved him, you know—and I did my best to get him away from everybody else—from *you*; because I saw—I thought I saw—that he cared for you. Don't speak, please: I want to go on. I did my best to—to *catch* him, you know: but he never cared for me. I soon found that out. And I'm rather glad I am going to die, because then he will be happy by and by. At least he will if you care for him, and you do, do you not?”

“I care for him, Daisy—but I should never have come between you. I believe you would have made him happy.”

“Not as you will do. When he asks you, you will marry him, won't you? I daresay he will wait a little while—I don't suppose he will forget me all at once; but when he *does* ask you, you'll remember, will you not, that I wanted you to say yes?”

“I will remember, dear. But we shall never forget you.”

“You will in time. But I like to think that Gilbert will be happy. And you too. I've been very nasty to you sometimes, Christine, I was always jealous of you, you see. But I'm sorry now, and you will forgive me, will you not?”

Christine's heart smote her, as she kissed the little

white face, with the conviction that it was she who had been most at fault; that she had been contemptuous, haughty, overbearing, and that the girl whom she had despised might well have been her teacher in many of the virtues which Christine had thought her own.

"That's done," said Daisy, with a little sigh of mingled fatigue and relief. "I don't know that there is any one else I want to see—except Evelyn—and poor Mr. Hoskins. I *should* like to see him once again."

So when she was able to see him he was brought to her bedside; and she smiled with a little air of amusement when he stood beside her, but an amusement that had something of affection in it too.

"Are you there?" she said. "I'm so glad. I want to thank you very much. You've been very good to me."

Mr. Hoskins' self-command gave way. He put up his hand to his eyes and sobbed aloud. Daisy looked at him with grave surprise.

"You ought not to be sorry," she said. "You are not like Gervase; *you* believe in a God and in Heaven, of course, as you are a minister. You think I am safe, do you not? You don't think there is any doubt about that?"

The young man said something incoherent about his beliefs, and his assurance that all was well with her; and Daisy seemed satisfied.

"I'm very glad you think so," she said, "and I am really so tired of living here that I am glad to go away. Perhaps,"—rather wistfully, "if you would say some sort of a prayer with me, it would do me good. I don't know much about these things, but I've said 'Our Father' every night since I was a little girl—except when I was too tired, after a ball or anything, you know."

"You have had Mr. Anderson, dear," said Evelyn, who was now beside her.

"Yes, I know. But Mr. Hoskins has been such a good friend to me," said Daisy, with a little smile. "If he would just take hold of my hand—and say a prayer——"

The demand for help steadied the young man's nerves at once. He took the girl's hand in his own, and lifted his voice in prayer. It mattered nothing to him that there were others in the room—that Gervase Vibert, the unbeliever, had come, stricken by remorse, to look his last upon the face of the girl whom he had distrusted; that Evelyn Vibert, the woman who would have been lost to all sense of honor and duty but for Daisy's strong hand, was weeping her heart out at his side, and that Gilbert Greville, fighting hard for self-mastery, waited for a last look or word—the young minister had his own work to do in recommending a soul to God, and he was conscious of nothing else. He said a few words only, but they were enough: they brought to the girl's brow a look of entire and perfect peace.

When the prayer was ended, she signed to them all to come and kiss her one by one. Gervase Vibert groaned aloud as he gave her that farewell kiss, but neither of the others uttered a sound of grief. A sense of the relief that was coming to that faithful little soul was strong enough within them to keep them still. All that Daisy said was a word in Evelyn's ear. "Remember," she whispered. It was enough. And there was silence for a time.

"Good-night," she said at last, although the daylight was bright within the little room. "I think I shall go to sleep now, I'm so tired. Evie—we'll say our prayers together to-night, won't we?" It was a fleeting memory of her childish days. "Say it aloud. 'Our Father'—go on, Evie. I can't remember what comes next."

How long was it since Evelyn Vibert had said that prayer?

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation ; but deliver us from evil——"

"Deliver us from evil." Then the end came. And she was delivered from the evil of this world.

CHAPTER XL.

"THE MEMORY OF THE JUST."

WITH Daisy's death there came a breaking up of various parties which had hitherto lingered on at Cairo, in spite of the approach of hotter weather. Mr. and Mrs. Vibert expressed their determination to seek a cooler climate, and the Lingards resolved to go first, under the conduct of General Forrester, to Scanderia, and thence to England. From further information received, it was positively certain that Florian was giving up all claim to the late Colonel Lingard's estate, and it was more than probable that it would be divided ultimately among his nieces. The matter was finally decided in an unlooked-for manner. Colonel Lingard's will was found in an old bureau in his house ; and by the terms of this will, Christine inherited almost everything—on one condition : that she married Gilbert Greville. If she did not marry him within two years, the money was to be divided among certain specified persons. Of the secretary, Florian, there was not a single word ; nor was there anything to show that the Colonel had been married and had a son. Coincidentally with

the finding of this document, there came news that the claimant, who called himself Florian Lingard, had been drowned at sea. There was no reason, therefore, why the will should not take effect.

Mrs. Lingard, much scandalized by its terms, was very anxious that it should be completely ignored. "We do not want the money," she said, with a proud lifting of her stately head. "I will never consent to my daughter's selling herself for a fortune. It would be much better if neither Christine nor Captain Greville were told anything about it."

But to this suggestion, the General, her chief adviser, would not consent. He made a call upon Greville, and had a long conversation with him. What the result was, he did not divulge to any one, but from the expression upon his countenance, his friends judged that it had been satisfactory.

Christine and Gilbert saw each other when they stood together at Daisy Touchwood's grave at the funeral; but afterwards they did not meet. Mrs. Lingard was anxious to leave Cairo at once, and Greville shut himself up a great deal, and did not even come to say farewell. The only token of remembrance that Christine received from him was a great bouquet of white flowers which his servant brought to the train for her on the day of their departure. But she understood his silence and was content.

Jack Forrester came to the station to see them off, and was loud in his lamentations at the approaching separation. The Lingards were to stay a week or two at Mahatta, however, before they sailed for England, and he hoped to get a couple of days' leave and see them again before they went.

"And I shall come to England this summer," he remarked to Nell, as he walked with her up and down the

platform before she got into the carriage, "and then, you know, we can make further arrangements."

"Can we?" said Nell, innocently. "What arrangements?"

"Oh, I can choose the wedding-cake, you know," said Jack, cheerfully. "And you had better ask my advice about gowns, you know. You mustn't think of yourself alone, you know, Nell. You will have to please me now as well as yourself."

"I should be very sorry to dress as your taste dictated," said Nell, with infinite scorn; whereat there was more banter, and the parting of the young lovers was attended rather with laughter than with tears.

To Christine, as she sat in the railway-carriage, and watched the spires and minarets of Cairo die from her sight, and the blue outlines of the Pyramids disappear from the distant horizon, all that had happened seemed like a strange dim dream, in which love and grief, joy and fear and hope, were inextricably blended. How much had happened during the last few months that she would always regret: much that she would cherish the memory of, and rejoice over, in days to come! Whether joy or grief predominated as yet she scarcely knew.

She had hardly seen the Viberts since Daisy's death. Mrs. Vibert was reported to be quite prostrated by grief, and her one object was to get away from Cairo. But she had not been well enough to leave her room when the Lingards started for Scanderia, and therefore all that they could do had been to leave cards. But they were destined to meet once more before Egypt was entirely left behind.

Mrs. Lingard liked Mahatta and remained there longer than she had expected to do. It was towards the end of May when Christine came face to face with Evelyn Vibert once again. She had strolled away from the house to the sea-

shore, late in the afternoon, and was watching the waves break on the sand, when she became aware that a woman's figure was approaching her. Something familiar in the gait, or the turn of the head, made her look at it with some care. Then she saw that it belonged to Mrs. Vibert, and, to her surprise, Mrs. Vibert stopped short and addressed her by name.

"Miss Lingard," she said, "may I speak to you for a moment?"

Christine stopped at once, bowed, but made no reply. She had to struggle with a great dislike to this woman with a repulsion of feeling that was almost uncontrollable. Perhaps Evelyn divined this feeling, for she put back the thick black veil that she wore, and looked Christine full in the face, as if appealing for pity on account of the change that was to be found there.

For she was changed—there was no doubt of that. Her face was white and thin: her eyes had sunk, her mouth was compressed and drawn. The satisfied complacency of her expression had disappeared: she looked worn and sorrowful, but, as Christine was quick to notice, neither softened nor subdued.

"I hoped that I should meet you," Mrs. Vibert began. "I had something that I wanted to say. I was too ill to see you before you left Cairo."

Christine had nothing to say, but she stood still and listened.

"We are only passing through," said Evelyn. "We are going to Aix-les-Bains, so that Mr. Vibert may take the waters. I don't know if you have heard what has happened to him?"

"I have heard nothing."

"He is paralyzed. He cannot speak: he can only make signs. His limbs are powerless. He will never be able to walk or speak again,"

"I am very sorry," said Christine. "Perhaps Aix-les-Bains will benefit him : I hope it may."

"I hope it may, too," said Evelyn, as mechanically as if she were repeating a lesson, while her great sorrowful eyes went seeking the horizon, as though they found nothing nearer worth resting on, "but I don't suppose so. It is a hopeless case, they say."

Christine again expressed regret, but felt that nothing she could say would find its way to Evelyn's heart. The woman seemed impervious to consolation.

"I wanted to tell you," she broke in, abruptly, "that if at any time you choose to tell the truth about Daisy—about myself, of course I mean—you are at liberty to do so. Tell your mother and your sister, and the General and Mr. Forrester—anybody you choose."

Christine recoiled a little. "Would it not be better to let the past alone? What is the use of injuring the living for the sake of the dead?"

"It will not injure me now," said Mrs. Vibert, calmly. "I do not care what people say of me—I care what they say of Daisy. I don't think that many people think ill of her now, but there may be some lingering feeling against her, and I want to stop it as far as I can. I've told more than one person myself."

"But Mr. Vibert!"

Evelyn uttered a low, shuddering little laugh. "I told him too," she said, looking at Christine wildly. "I told him everything. And it was then that he fell down before me—just like a dead man. It was paralysis, you know, the doctors said. He had struck me and cursed me first, and I thought he would have turned me out of the house; but when he fell down and spoke no more—I thought——"

"Yes, what did you think?" said Christine, eagerly. She was too anxious, too much moved by the spectacle of

the conscience-stricken woman before her, to restrain the question that rose to her lips.

"I thought," said Evelyn slowly, and turning her eyes once more to the horizon, "of a promise that I had given to my sister when she was dying—that I would be good to Gervase and never leave him again. And for Daisy's sake I shall try to keep my word."

"You are nursing him?—taking care of him, then?"

"There is a trained nurse with him generally," said Evelyn, with composure, "and sometimes he cannot bear to see me in the room. But there are little things that I can do from time to time; and every now and then he likes me to be with him and to read to him—as you used to do. His mind is quite strong—and the doctors say he may live for ten or twenty years."

What an outlook for a young and beautiful woman? What a downfall of her hopes and her ambitions! Christine felt a growing pity for her.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked gently.

"Nothing, thank you. I have no friends, and I want none. Who would be friends with me now, after knowing that wretched story of mine? And every one knows it now."

"Then you are all the more free to begin a new life: you are deceiving no one—not even yourself. Can I not help you? Will you not at least count me your friend?"

Evelyn looked at her intently for a minute or two, as if to see whether she were quite in earnest. Then her lips curved in an inexpressibly sad and bitter smile.

"What would Captain Greville say?" she asked.

"My actions are not controlled by Captain Greville."

"Not now, but they will be. Oh, yes, my eyes are open, and I have known all along that he cared for you more

than for Daisy. But he was sorry for Daisy, and he will not let you be friends with me. I know what men are."

"No—not all men!" said Christine, impetuously; and then she stopped short and colored deeply.

"Not all men—no," returned Evelyn, with the same dreary composure, "but I know what many men are like. Perhaps I have had a bad experience. I should be glad if I need never speak to another as long as I live."

There was the old, passionate rebellion against the inevitable in her voice, the old strife and longing and trouble in her beautiful eyes. Christine felt sad and sick at heart.

"I must go back now," said Mrs. Vibert at length. "He will be wanting me to read to him. We sail to-morrow. I thought I should like to see you again before I went."

She pulled down her veil and moved away without offering her hand. Christine turned with her, and laid her hand gently on her rigid arm.

"Let me walk back with you," she said.

"No, don't," said Evelyn, abruptly. "He would see you and ask what I had been saying. He can make himself understood, you know, though he cannot speak. And I don't tell him more lies now than I can help. I think I shall make a fairly good wife to him in the end," she added, with the bitter tragic little laugh which had already gone more than once to Christine's heart.

"Then you will let me wish you God speed," said Christine holding out her hand. After a little hesitation, Evelyn touched it with her fingers, and then drew them coldly away.

"You are very kind," she said; "but of course I know that there can be no real friendship between you and me. I will take your good wishes as they are meant; and—and—you are a religious woman, Christine Lingard, it would

not hurt you if now and then you put a word into your prayers for Gervase and me."

She did not wait for a reply ; and Christine could only watch the slender, black figure hurrying across the sand, and feel that she was baffled though not hopeless. No, certainly not hopeless ; for was not Evelyn Vibert on the road of a repentance which might ultimately lead to pardon and peace and higher things ?

She never saw the Viberts again. Now and then she heard of them, as travelling from place to place—Mr. Vibert, a hopeless invalid, Evelyn (as everybody said) a devoted wife. Once Christine was visited by Mr. Hoskins, who had gone back to his congregation and was proving himself a thoughtful and eloquent preacher in the States ; and Mr. Hoskins told her that Mrs. Vibert wrote to him from time to time, and seemed to like him to reply in the tone that was most natural to him—that is, with constant reference to religious topics. His own opinion was that when Mr. Vibert died, his widow would declare her intention of entering a sisterhood. But there seemed no likelihood of this, at present, as Mr. Vibert was likely to linger on for years.

Christine went home with her mother and sister, soon after that meeting with Mrs. Vibert on the Mahatta sands ; and she spent a quiet summer with them, absorbing herself as much as possible in preparations for Nell's marriage, which was to take place in the autumn. Jack Forrester's regiment was ordered home about that time, and Mrs. Lingard was pleased to find that it would be quartered very near the place where she had lived so long. And when Forrester came home, it followed naturally that Greville arrived soon afterwards, to act as his best man.

Christine avoided him a little, and he did not actually try to seek her out until the wedding festivities were over. Then finding her in the garden, one mild evening, when

the breath of the late rose still hung on the autumnal air, he very quietly took her hand in his.

"And when is our wedding to be, Christine?" he asked.

She looked up at him with eyes which could not help smiling and shining. "There has been no talk of that," she said.

"No talk of it; but you have understood me all this while, have you not? What has come between us? Why do you stand aloof from me, Christine? Is it this question of money—of Colonel Lingard's will?"

"I think perhaps it is," she answered, looking down.

"My darling, I think you may acquit me of fortune-hunting."

"Oh, I know," she said, blushing. "I know that you refused me once."

"And fell in love with you when I thought you hadn't a penny," said Gilbert, smiling at her. "Let us have no more misunderstandings, my love. I have loved no one else, as I love you."

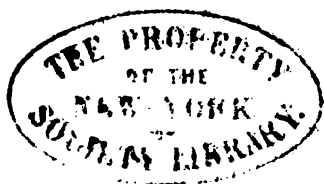
"Nor I—as I love you," she answered. And if he thought of Daisy, she thought for a moment of John Arbuthnot, and the shadow of an ancient dream fell between them both. But she turned to him again, with a great love and a great trust shining from her eyes.

"I promised Daisy that we would not forget her, Gilbert. And she told me to make you happy."

They were all their lives the happier for the blessing that the dead girl's words seemed to have laid upon them. For, in conquering the one great temptation of her life, Daisy Touchwood had left behind her an influence, a memory, that would ever more

"Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust."





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